

# ALFRED HITCHCOCK MYSTERY

**M A G A Z I N E**

JULY 1995

## CATERPILLAR BONES

**A Captivating New  
Herbie Sawyer  
Mystery**

**by D. A. McGUIRE**

**PLUS**

**The Alison Lurie  
Ghost Story  
Contest Winner**

\$2.50 U.S./\$3.25 CAN.



0 38716 36001 9

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG  
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED



1610 \$20.00/\$9.98



1461\* \$21.95/\$9.98



1172 \$19.95/\$9.98



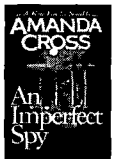
1677 \$18.95/\$9.98



1974 \$7.98x



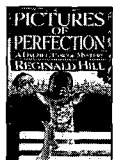
1578\* \$23.95/\$9.98



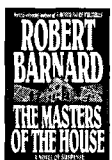
1453 \$20.00/\$9.98

# The forecast calls

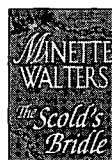
You can expect the hottest mysteries—at the mildest prices—when you belong to *Mystery Guild*®.



1206 \$19.95/\$9.98



1214 \$20.00/\$9.98



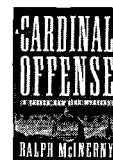
1297 \$21.95/\$10.98



1263 \$21.95/\$9.98



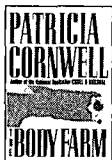
1032 \$18.95/\$9.98



0752 \$21.95/\$9.98



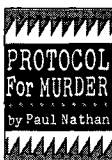
0265\* \$21.95/\$9.98



0950\* \$23.00/\$10.98



7401 \$22.95/\$11.98



1248 \$22.00/\$9.98



0992 \$22.00/\$10.98



0281 \$21.95/\$9.98

## HERE'S WHAT YOU GET WHEN YOU JOIN...

**A GUARANTEE OF SATISFACTION.** Once your membership's accepted, we'll send your 6 **BOOKS** and **FREE CLUB TOTE**. If you're dissatisfied with the books, return them within 10 days *at our expense*. Membership will be canceled; you'll owe nothing.

**HUGE DISCOUNTS ON HARDCOVER BOOKS.** Save as much as 60% off publishers' edition prices. Club books are sometimes altered in size to fit special presses.

**THE FREE CLUB MAGAZINE.** You'll receive up to 16 issues a year. Each reviews the Featured Book Selections plus dozens of alternate books.

**SHOPPING MADE SIMPLE.** To get the Featured Book Selections, *do nothing*—they will be sent automatically, if you prefer another book—or none at all—return your Member Reply Form by the specified date. A shipping and handling

charge (and sales tax, where applicable) is added to each order.

**AN EASY-TO-MEET OBLIGATION.** Take up to 2 years to buy 4 more books at regular low Club prices. Afterwards, you may resign membership anytime.

**RISK-FREE RETURN PRIVILEGES.** If you get an unwanted book because your Club magazine was delayed and you had less than 10 days to respond, return the book *at our expense*.

Prices in fine print are for publishers' editions.

Prices in bold print are for Club hardcover editions.

\* Explicit scenes and/or language.  
x Hardcover edition exclusively for Club members.



**FREE TOTE**  
with membership

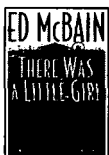
LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG  
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED



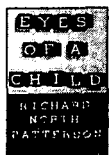
1586 \$19.95/\$9.98



0901 \$21.95/\$9.98



1156 \$21.95/\$9.98



1420\* \$24.00/\$9.98



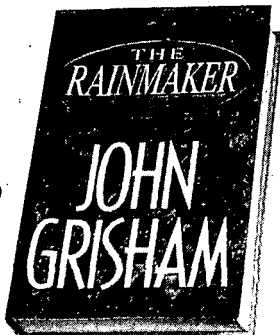
1404\* \$23.95/\$9.98



1446 \$20.00/\$9.98

# for Murder

## Take 6 books for 99¢ with membership



1883 \$25.95/\$12.98



0737\* \$24.00/\$12.98



0729 \$22.00/\$11.98



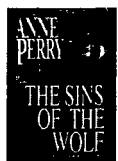
0356 \$20.00/\$9.98



0521 \$21.95/\$9.98



0547 \$19.95/\$8.98



0687 \$21.95/\$9.98



0661 \$21.00/\$9.98



7773 \$19.95/\$8.98

# MYSTERY

## GUILD

MAIL TO: *Mystery Guild*  
6550 East 30th Street  
P.O. Box 6362  
Indianapolis, IN 46206-6362

**YES!** Please enroll me in *Mystery Guild* according to the risk-free membership plan described in this ad. Send me the 6 BOOKS I've indicated—plus my FREE CLUB TOTE. Bill me just 99¢, plus shipping and handling.

**SAVE EVEN MORE!** Send me this book now and reduce my commitment to 3 more books. Bill me an added \$3.49, plus shipping and handling.

(write book number)

--	--	--	--

58935 78

Mr./Mrs.

Miss/Ms. \_\_\_\_\_

(please print)

Address \_\_\_\_\_

Apt. \_\_\_\_\_

City \_\_\_\_\_

State \_\_\_\_\_

Zip \_\_\_\_\_

Please write book numbers here:

--	--	--	--

--	--	--	--

--	--	--	--

--	--	--	--

--	--	--	--

--	--	--	--

79

Members accepted in U.S.A. and Canada only. Canadian members serviced from Canada, where offer is slightly different. Sales tax added where applicable. We reserve the right to reject any application.

AHM 7/95

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG  
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

# CONTENTS



## SHORT STORIES

<b>RULE XXII</b> by Paul G. Reeve	<b>6</b>
<b>THE WORD FOR BREAKING AUGUST SKY</b> by James Sarafin	<b>27</b>
<b>THE DEADLY UMBRELLA</b> by Robert Koshinski	<b>44</b>
<b>A CRIME MOST FOWL</b> by Don Marshall	<b>53</b>
<b>CATERPILLAR BONES</b> by D. A. McGuire	<b>60</b>
<b>A FEELING FOR THE TRUTH</b> by William T. Lowe	<b>96</b>
<b>THE BODY</b> by Maggie Wagner-Hankins	<b>112</b>

## MYSTERY CLASSIC

<b>THE MURDERER</b> by Joel Townsley Rogers	<b>133</b>
---	------------

## DEPARTMENTS

<b>EDITOR'S NOTES</b>	<b>4</b>
<b>THE MYSTERIOUS PHOTOGRAPH</b>	<b>59</b>
<b>UNSOLVED</b> by Robert Kesling	<b>93</b>
<b>SOLUTION TO THE JUNE "UNSOLVED"</b>	<b>150</b>
<b>BOOKED &amp; PRINTED</b> by Mary Cannon	<b>151</b>
<b>MURDER BY DIRECTION</b> by William Heller	<b>155</b>
<b>THE STORY THAT WON</b>	<b>157</b>

**ALFRED HITCHCOCK MYSTERY MAGAZINE** Vol. 40, No. 7, July, 1995. Published every 28 days, which includes special issues in June and at year end, by Bantam Doubleday Dell Magazines, \$2.50 per copy in the U.S.A. \$3.25 in Canada. Annual subscription \$34.97 in the U.S.A. and possessions; \$44.97 elsewhere (in Canada, GST is included) payable in advance in U.S. funds. Allow 6 to 8 weeks for change of address. Call 800-333-3311 with questions about your subscription. Editorial and Executive Offices, 1540 Broadway, N.Y., N.Y. 10036. Subscription orders and mail regarding subscriptions should be sent to P.O. Box 5124, Harlan, IA 51593-5124. Second class postage paid at New York, N.Y., and at additional mailing office. Canadian postage paid at Windsor, Ontario. Canada Post International Publications Mail, Product Sales Agreement No. 260665. © 1995 by Bantam Doubleday Dell Magazines, all rights reserved. The stories in this magazine are all fictitious, and any resemblance between the characters in them and actual persons is completely coincidental. Protection secured under the Universal Copyright Convention. Reproduction or use without express permission of editorial or pictorial content in any manner is prohibited. All submissions must be accompanied by stamped self-addressed envelope; the Publisher assumes no responsibility for unsolicited manuscripts. POSTMASTER: Send Change of Address to Alfred Hitchcock Mystery Magazine, P.O. Box 5124, Harlan, IA, 51593-5124. In Canada return to 3255 Wyandotte Street East, Windsor, Ontario, N8Y 1E9. GST #R123054108.

ISSN: 0002-5224. Printed in U.S.A.

COVER BY BEN VERKOOIK

ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED



# JOURNEY INTO MAGIC!

## DINOTOPIA AUDIO ADVENTURE

Enter the enchanting land of Dinotopia where dinosaurs and humans live in harmony. Inspired by James Gurney's bestselling book *Dinotopia*, *The Dinotopia Audio Adventure* has been created on two audio cassettes. Join Arthur Denison and his son, Will, as they transport you to this unique utopia. Come along on this wonderful journey!



## PAGEMASTER AUDIO ADVENTURE

Enjoy this classic, best selling volume as a spectacular audio adventure. Join young Richard Tyler on his amazing excursion in the library where he is plunged into a land in which the world's greatest stories come to life. This wonderful package offers almost two hours of entertainment. Also included is a ten-character cast headed up by Christopher Lloyd, one of the stars of Twentieth Century Fox's movie *The Pagemaster*. Listen for *The Pagemaster's* magic!



Please send me:

\_\_\_\_ copies of *The Pagemaster Audio Adventure* @ \$14.95 (\$20.95 Can.)

\_\_\_\_ copies of the *Dinotopia Audio Adventure* @ \$14.95 (\$20.95 Can.)

Please add \$2.00 per item for shipping & handling. NYS residents add 8.25% sales tax.

Send to: **Turner Publishing, Inc., 420 Fifth Avenue, New York, NY 10018** Dept. 075AH

Name \_\_\_\_\_

Address \_\_\_\_\_

Phone \_\_\_\_\_

City \_\_\_\_\_

State \_\_\_\_\_

Zip \_\_\_\_\_

# EDITOR'S NOTES

by Cathleen Jordan

**W**e are happy to announce that two stories from AHMM—"The Dancing Bear" by Doug Allyn (March 1994) and "The Tennis Court" by Brenda Melton Burnham (July)—have been nominated for Edgar awards, presented by the Mystery Writers of America, for Best Short Story of 1994.

And an AHMM author from previous years, Steve Barancik, has been nominated for an Edgar for Best Screenplay (*The Last Seduction*).

By the next issue, the winners will have been named. As usual, we will provide you with the complete list of nominees and winners in all categories.

In the meantime, in this issue...

We are pleased to bring you the story that won the Alison

Lurie "Write an Original Ghost Story" contest, sponsored by Nan A. Talese/Doubleday. (The contest rules appeared in our October 1994 issue.) "The Word for Breaking August Sky" by James Sarafin was chosen, and it's an excellent story indeed.

This is Mr. Sarafin's first mystery story and first publication, although he had made a prior sale to *Asimov's Science Fiction* magazine for an upcoming tale. Born in Columbus, Ohio, he now calls Anchorage, Alaska, home. Mr. Sarafin has been a civil trial lawyer in private practice for the past fourteen years. For about a year and a half before that, he lived in Japan, where he taught English. He and his wife have two children.

We also want to welcome

(continued on page 52)

**Cathleen Jordan**, Editor; **Susan A. Teitz**, Assistant Editor; **Jean Traina**, Design Director; **Terri Czezko**, Art Director; **Anthony Bari**, Junior Designer; **Marilyn Roberts**, Director of Production; **Carole Dixon**, Production Manager; **Cynthia Manson**, Vice President of Marketing and Subsidiary Rights; **Constance Scarborough**, Contracts Manager; **Barbara Parrott**, Director of Newsstand Circulation; **Bruce Schwartz**, Director of Circulation, Subscription Sales; **Dennis Jones**, Operations Manager, Subscription Sales; **Fred Sabloff**, Associate Publisher; **Judy Dorman**, Advertising Sales Manager. **Advertising Offices**, New York: (212) 782-8549. **Advertising Representative**: Dresner Direct, Inc., New York, New York, (212) 889-1078.

**Joachim P. Rosler**, President and Publisher, Dell Magazines  
**Jack Hoeft**, President and CEO, Bantam Doubleday Dell Publishing Group, Inc.

# THE BEST OF THE LOWLIFE **GRIFTERS AND SWINDLERS**

Edited by Cynthia Manson

## **GRIFTERS AND SWINDLERS**

STORIES BY

JIM THOMPSON • DAVID MORRELL  
JULIAN SYMONS • SIMON BRETT  
AND DONALD E. WESTLAKE,  
AMONG OTHERS



EDITED BY CYNTHIA MANSON

**T**his entertaining book contains short stories about swindlers, grifters, and con men from all walks of life by a wide range of talent – including Simon Brett, Robert L. Fish, William Campbell Gault, David Morrell, Julian Symons,

Jim Thompson and others.

**CARROLL & GRAF PUBLISHERS, INC**

Please send me \_\_\_\_\_ copies of *Grifters and Swindlers*. I enclose my check for \$\_\_\_\_\_ (\$18.95 plus \$1.50 for postage and handling for each copy). N.Y. State residents: add 8.25% sales tax to your order. Send orders to: Dept. 075 AH  
Carroll & Graf Publishers, Inc. 260 Fifth Avenue, New York, New York 10001

Name \_\_\_\_\_

Address \_\_\_\_\_

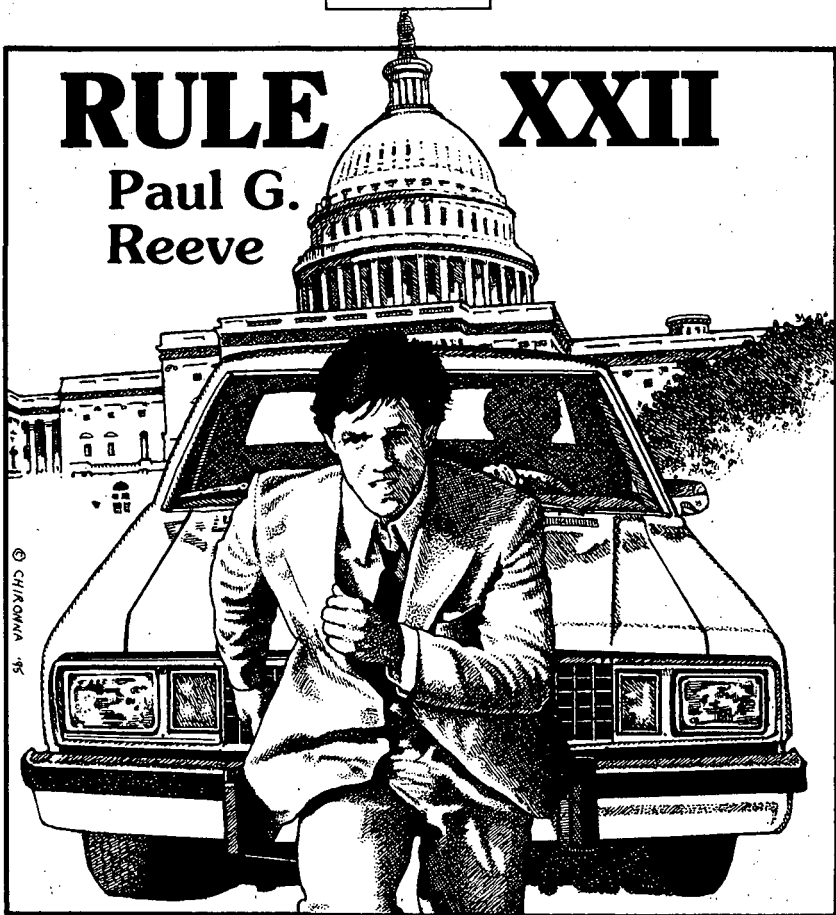
City \_\_\_\_\_ State \_\_\_\_\_ ZIP \_\_\_\_\_

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG  
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

FICTION

# RULE XXII

Paul G.  
Reeve



““**L**isten, my children, and you shall hear of the midnight ride of Paul Revere,” the senator said. I was about to doze off. I did doze off.

I woke with a start. “‘Life is real, life is earnest...’” the senator was saying. He was ap-

parently working his way through Longfellow. Judging from the pile on his desk, he still had Shakespeare and the Manhattan phone book to go.

The Senate chamber was almost empty of senators. In the chair was a very junior senator, and two other junior senators,

representing the leadership of each side, were sitting at their desks, reading mail or magazines and totally oblivious to the proceedings. A couple of other staffers and I were sitting on the leather sofas at the rear of the chamber.

You've all seen this before. "Extended debate" or, less politely, "filibuster." It's what Jimmy Stewart did in *Mr. Smith Goes to Washington*. Except that it is rarely done solo, the way Jimmy did it. Usually, a number of like-minded senators run a sort of tag team, one taking over for another.

The Senate has a long tradition of unlimited debate. As long as someone holds the floor and talks, the debate continues. So a minority of senators who don't want a bill to come to a vote can try to talk it to death—to force the Senate to move on to more pressing matters without taking a vote or to force the majority to agree to amendments that would make the bill more palatable to the filibusterers.

The majority is not without resources, however. They can try to wear down the filibuster by staying in session around the clock. That's why I was sliding off the staff sofa at the back of the Senate Chamber near midnight that summer in 1965.

"Mr. President," the senator said, "I suggest the absence of a quorum."

And there you have the drawback to the tactic of trying to wear down a filibuster. The majority has to keep a quorum on hand, or the Senate will adjourn rather than recess. Rule XIX of the Standing Rules of the Senate says that "no Senator shall speak more than twice upon any one question in debate on the same day. . . ." Adjournment means the next meeting will be a new legislative day, and all the senators get two more times at bat.

The clerk droned out the names of senators, who began coming out of the woodwork.

I stood up, stretched, and looked around. During these late night sessions there was almost never anyone in the galleries, so I was surprised to see, peering down from the press gallery, a reporter, Stephanie Glass. She was a good friend, if any reporter can be said to be a friend. What Joan Didion once said about writers in general is true in spades for reporters—they are always selling someone out. Still, I liked Stephanie. I didn't care very much, however, for her boss.

She was a leg man—leg person?—for the columnist Preston Gale. Nobody ever confused Gale with Walter Lippmann.



He was no deep thinker. His column was more in the manner of Westbrook Pegler or Drew Pearson, only more mean-spirited. In fact, he called his column "Washington Whirligig," taking the title from a line in Shakespeare's *Twelfth Night*: "The whirligig of time brings in his revenges." I didn't hold Stephanie responsible for what Gale did with the information she took him, but like everyone else on Capitol Hill, I was careful what I said to her.

When my boss, Senator Sansom, came in to answer the quorum call, I told him it looked as though the filibustering senators would continue until someone took away their library cards. He said there was no point in my hanging around. He would sleep on the sofa in his office in the event of further quorum calls.

I went down to catch the subway back to the Old Senate Office Building, but it was crawling with senators drawn out by the quorum call. So I set out through the tunnel on foot. The subway isn't a real subway, just open tram cars that run on rails through a well lighted tunnel with a broad walkway.

I hadn't gone very far when Stephanie Glass fell into step alongside me. "How long before

your side breaks the back of the filibuster?"

"You know, I was just remarking the other day, that's the trouble with reporters. It's never 'Hello, nice to see you, you're looking well.' No. They start right in, 'When are you gonna bust the filibuster. . . .'"

"Okay. Fine. Hello, Ross, nice to see you, you're looking well. There."

"Oh, hello, Stephanie. What a pleasure to see you. How would you like to join me for a late night snack at the Monocle?"

We stopped by my office so I could drop off some correspondence I had been working on and leave a note for my secretary. While we were there, Stephanie called her office to report that the filibuster was still dragging on and to give my personal estimate ("Senate sources say") of the nose count for a cloture vote.

I went back to my nook behind a partition at the back of the reception area while Stephanie used the receptionist's phone. After I put away my files, I returned to find Stephanie, slack-jawed and ashen, still holding the phone in her right hand.

"What's the matter?" I asked.

"Orson. He's dead. . . ." Orson Crouch was one of her colleagues, another of Preston

Gale's henchmen. I didn't think she was especially friendly with him.

"What happened?"

"Hit and run. Near his apartment in Arlington."

After that, Stephanie didn't have much of an appetite. She was upset, not just because Crouch was dead, but also because the last time she had seen him they had quarreled. And she had expressed the hope that he would be hit by a truck.

The next morning I took my time getting started. Since I had been at work till midnight, I didn't think I needed to put in an appearance at the office at the crack of nine.

I was having a cup of coffee and reading the paper when the phone rang. I answered it, and a voice at the other end said, "Thank God you're there!"

"Stephanie?"

"Yeah. The police were just here. They don't think Orson's death was an accident."

"No?"

"No. And you're my alibi."

"Alibi? They think you did it?"

"I don't know. They were like Sergeant Friday. Very close-mouthed. Just the facts, ma'am. But they know I was heard loudly wishing Orson

dead. Anyhow, I told them I was with you."

I spoke to Stephanie for another five or ten minutes, trying to reassure her. Then I called my office to find out what was going on. The only messages were that Stephanie had called and that the police were looking for me.

On the business front, I discovered that a cloture petition would be filed. Under Rule XXII of the Senate, if sixteen senators sign a motion to close off debate, the Senate will vote on the motion "on the following calendar day but one." That meant that day after tomorrow a cloture vote would be taken. I didn't think it would work. In those days cloture required a two-thirds vote.

Since no important legislative activity was expected, I told my secretary I wouldn't be in until later that afternoon. No sooner had I hung up the phone than there was a knock at the door. It was beginning to look as though I would have to go to the office just to get some peace and quiet.

Through the peephole in the door I could see a man of average height, wearing a charcoal gray suit, white shirt, narrow tie, and a felt snap-brim. If he had been wearing white socks and sunglasses, I would have thought he was Secret Service.

Behind him and to his right was a bulkier fellow wearing a rumpled seersucker suit.

I opened the door. "How can I help you?"

"Mr. Ross Ward?"

"Yes."

"I'm Detective Mark O'Brien, D.C. police department." He showed me his badge. "And this is Sergeant J. D. Sutton of the Arlington County sheriff's department. We'd like to ask you a few questions."

"Sure. Come on in." I stood aside and gestured toward the living room.

"Can I get you a cup of coffee?" I asked.

"No, thanks," O'Brien answered. "This will just take a minute or two."

"Fine. What can I do for you?"

"Where were you last night between ten and midnight?" Sutton took over the questioning with a Tidewater drawl.

"At work, if you can call it that. A lot of the time I was in the Senate Chamber."

"Is there anybody who could confirm that?"

"About a half a dozen senators, if they were paying attention."

"Anyone else?"

"Oh, you mean like Stephanie Glass, who was in the press gallery late last night and

who came with me to my office a little before midnight and phoned her office and found out that one of her colleagues had been killed? Sutton, do they teach you that cagey questioning in cop school? Is there some reason you can't just come straight out and say what we're talking about?"

"I take it you've spoken with Miss Glass, then?"

I almost said, "Amazing, Holmes!" but I bit my tongue instead and said, "Umhm."

"Then you knew that Arlington wanted to ask you some questions?" O'Brien smirked.

"Yeah. But why didn't they just call me and ask?"

"J. D. wanted to see how you would react."

"Oh? How am I doing?"

O'Brien twirled his hat on his index finger. "I'm not impressed."

"Me either," I said.

J. D. resumed questioning. He spent another half hour or so asking me the same thing a dozen different ways. Where had I been last night, was Stephanie there, what was she doing, what time had I seen her, was I sure, how well did I know her, what did I know about her relationship with Crouch, did I know Crouch, how well did I know him?

When he paused, rewinding to start the whole thing over

again, I spoke up. "You haven't come up with a new question in the last thirty minutes. Let me ask one." That took him back a bit. It even woke up O'Brien, who had been settled on the sofa, staring out the window. Up until then I had been answering questions as mechanically as J. D. had asked them. He started to say something but lit another Camel instead. He had been chain-smoking ever since I had hospitably said I didn't mind if he smoked.

"Why are you so sure Crouch wasn't just an ordinary hit and run victim?" I asked.

"Your friend seems to have told you all the other answers. Ask her."

"All Stephanie told me was that you were asking questions. She didn't say what the answers were."

"Okay. It'll be in the afternoon papers anyhow. The driver chased Crouch up on the sidewalk, ran over him, and then backed up over him to make sure."

"And this sounds to you like something Stephanie would do?"

"She was heard wishing out loud that something like it would happen to him. Heard by half the reporters in the D.C. area, who happened to be at the National Press Club. If you

can't trust the press, who can you trust?"

Pretty nearly anyone, starting with used car salesmen and politicians, I thought, but I didn't say anything.

"The car was found in D.C.," O'Brien said. "It had been stolen on Capitol Hill, from the Senate staff parking lot."

"So that's your end of this? Auto theft?" I asked.

"This is my jurisdiction. J. D. wouldn't waltz in here without company."

The "few minutes" they had promised to take had ballooned to more than an hour before I finally got rid of O'Brien and his Southern-fried sidekick. I found out that the car, a '62 Ford Fairlane, belonged to Anna Tobias, a receptionist in Senator Canaday's office. The keys had been stolen from the purse she kept under her desk. And Stephanie had been in the office that day.

When I finally went to work, the filibuster was still dragging on, but with the cloture vote pending, the pressure eased up. The Senate recessed that afternoon. I answered some mail and made a few phone calls. It didn't look like we would have the votes to shut off debate.

Having spent the night before in the office, the senator was in no mood to go to a cock-

tail party that night. So he sent me in his place. The party was being given by a bankers' association, and the chairman of the association was an important constituent.

The soiree was at the Key Bridge Marriott. I put in an appearance, spoke to the senator's friend, drank some of his scotch, and ate some rumaki. Then, since cocktail receptions bore me cross-eyed, I thought I would go have a look at the scene of the crime. Orson Crouch had lived at the Arlington Towers Apartments, only a few blocks away.

Coming out of the hotel, I could see the big red brick complex of the Arlington Towers, so I decided to walk. The walk proved farther than it looked. In the summer heat and humidity I worked up a sweat, even at twilight.

When I got to the parking lot at the apartment complex, I wasn't disappointed. I had thought there might be nothing to see, but even after the scene had been picked over by the cops and the ambulance crew had been back and forth with their paraphernalia, it was still pretty clear what had happened. Tiretracks ran across the grass, over a low shrub, and onto the sidewalk, where a dark stain was all that remained of Orson Crouch. The

car had apparently backed up over the same spot, then gone forward through a flowerbed, off the curb into the other end of the parking lot, and out the exit.

Whoever had been driving the car had waited at the enclosed end of the parking area so he could hit Crouch and make for the exit in one smooth movement. Late at night there wouldn't be much activity on the streets or in the lot.

While I was mulling all this over, I heard a car pull into the lot. It was an unmarked Chevrolet with Virginia government tags on it and J. D. Sutton behind the wheel. Sutton pulled into a parking place and got out. He called to me.

"That you, Mr. Ward? What you doin' here?"

"I was in the neighborhood and thought I'd have a look around."

From the passenger side of the car emerged Preston Gale, showing, in his face, posture, and movement, every one of his seventy-nine years.

"Mr. Gale here wanted to see the scene of the crime and to interview me," Sutton announced. He seemed to have an unduly high regard for journalists, and here was one who appeared three times a week in over two hundred papers nationwide.



"I don't believe we've met," Gale said, squinting at me in the semidarkness.

"Ross Ward. I work for Senator Sansom."

"Hmpf," Gale grunted, and turned to Sutton. "So, sergeant, what can you tell me about Orson's death?"

Sutton went over the tire-tracks on the grass and the spot where Crouch bit the dust. He saw it pretty much the same as I did. Going over it again, though, I thought of something I had missed earlier.

"Where was Crouch parked?" I asked.

"Right at the end of the walk here."

"Did he have an assigned parking space?"

"Yeah. On the other side of the lot."

"Do you realize he almost foiled the murderer?"

"Yeah. We figure he was supposed to park in his slot, and the murderer would run him down as he crossed the lot."

"Right. And if there hadn't been some open spaces along the curb, the murderer couldn't have chased him up the sidewalk."

"Just his bad luck."

Gale watched this exchange with Sutton with bored impatience. "So what's the point?" he asked.

"Well, Mr. Gale, it suggests that some planning went into the murder. It wasn't just some random act," Sutton said.

"More than that," I added. "It means the murderer knew not only where Crouch lived, but where he was supposed to park."

"Yep. That's why we liked Miss Glass for the job."

"But she was inconveniently elsewhere," I pointed out.

"Wait a minute," Gale said. "Do you think Stephanie did this?"

"No, sir, not any more. Like Mr. Ward says, she was somewhere else."

"Hmpf. If you ask me, I'd look at some of the political lowlifes Orson has been going after in the column lately."

"You mean like Senator Canaday? We're looking into that. The car belonged to one of his staffers."

"Well, there you are then. He could have had easy access to the car. Or the staffer could even have done it for him."

"Come on," I said. "Sometimes staff loyalty runs pretty deep, and sometimes, I must admit, I've fantasized about running over a columnist or two, but not even the most loyal Senate staffer is really going to kill someone on behalf of his boss."

All Sutton said was, "We're looking into it."

Back at the Key Bridge Marriott the bankers' reception was winding down. The hors d'oeuvres had been thoroughly demolished, and the bartender was putting away the liquor. The few remaining guests were gathered in clumps of three and four around the room. So I found a bank of pay phones and gave Stephanie a call to see how she was holding up and to tell her about my encounter with her boss.

She invited me to come by for dinner. To make up for reneging on our midnight snack at the Monocle the night before, she said. There was a hesitancy in her voice. She seemed to want to say something but wasn't sure what or how.

"Steph," I said, "is something wrong?"

"No. Yes. I don't know. Just ... just come on over. I'll tell you when you get here."

Since the rumaki and scotch hadn't done much to take the edge off my appetite, I quickly agreed. I had to go past her apartment on my way home anyhow.

Stephanie lived on Capitol Hill, in a townhouse on Maryland Avenue that had been divided into three apartments. Her apartment was on the first

floor. It had a large living area with a small kitchen nook off to the left as you entered the front door. At the back was a door leading to the bedroom. The dinner table, where Stephanie seated me immediately upon my arrival, was in the bay window at the front of the house.

Stephanie served up heaping plates of spaghetti, garlic bread, and tossed salad. She filled our glasses with Chianti before dimming the lights, lighting a candle, and sitting down. I admired the grace of her movement, the silken highlights in her dark, shoulder-length hair, the clear blue of her eyes. I was ready to be seduced.

"I want to thank you," she said, "for coming to my aid."

"There's nothing to thank me for," I said. "I just happened to know where you were when the cops thought you might be somewhere else."

"No. I mean now, tonight. What I wanted to say ... started to say over the phone ..." She paused. I waited. "Maybe I'm just paranoid."

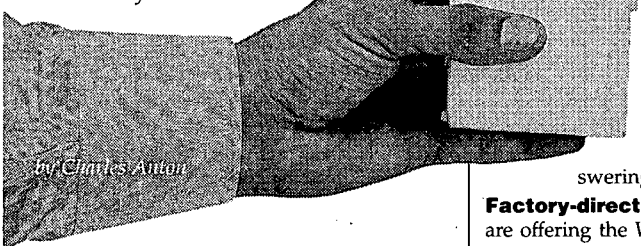
"Even paranoids can have real enemies," I joked lamely.

"Okay. Don't laugh at me, but I think I'm being followed. I think someone may have been in my apartment."

"Why? What tipped you off?"

# New device turns any electrical outlet into a phone jack

Engineering breakthrough gives you unlimited phone extensions without wires or expensive installation fees.



by Charles Anton

**Y**ou don't have to have a teenager to appreciate having extra phone jacks; we all wish we had more jacks in the house. Would you believe adding extra phone jacks in your home could cost up to \$158?

Now, a breakthrough device lets you add phone jacks anywhere you have an outlet. Without the hassle, expense, and best of all, without wires.

## As simple as plugging in an appliance.

The Wireless Phone Jack converts telephone signals to FM signals and broadcasts them over your home's electrical wiring. Just plug the transmitter into a jack and an outlet. Insert a receiver into an outlet anywhere in your home and move your phone to areas that have never had jacks before!

**Clear reception anywhere.** With the Wireless Phone Jack, your range extends as far as you have outlets: five feet or 500 feet. Its advanced companding noise reduction features guarantee crystal-clear reception, even in large homes.

You can use the Wireless Phone Jack in any outlet in or around your home, even if it's for a

different circuit than the transmitter. Each Wireless Phone Jack uses one of 65,000 different security codes: no other receiver will be able to pick up transmissions from your transmitter.

**Unlimited extensions, no charge.** Ordinary phone lines can usually only handle up to five extensions. But one Wireless Phone Jack transmitter will operate as many receivers as you want. Six, ten, there's no limit. Plus, you will never get a monthly charge for the extra receivers. This breakthrough technology will fulfill all your single-line phone needs. Its digital interface even works with your fax machine, modem and answering machine!

**Factory-direct offer.** For a limited time, we are offering the Wireless Phone Jack at factory-direct prices. Plus, any Wireless Phone Jack purchase qualifies you for a special discount on a 30-minute long distance phone card—a \$30 value.

**Try it risk-free.** The Wireless Phone Jack is backed by our exclusive 30-day risk-free home trial. If you're not satisfied, return for a full "No Questions Asked" refund. It's also backed by a one-year manufacturer's limited warranty.

## Wireless Phone Jack products:

Transmitter . . . . . \$49 \$4 S&H

Receiver . . . . . \$49 \$4 S&H

Additional receivers . . . . . \$39

30-minute phone card. . . . . \$38

**Just \$9.95 with any purchase!**

Please mention promotional code  
017-MG-1131.

## Added convenience anyone could appreciate...

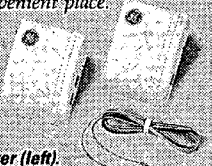
■ **Few jacks.** You want more extensions without the expense of calling the phone company.

■ **Bad location.** You don't have jacks where you need them most, like in the garage or home office.

■ **Renting.** You want to add extensions, but don't want to pay each time you move.

■ **Other phone devices.** You want to move your answering machine, modem or fax machine to a more convenient place.

Wireless  
Phone  
Jack  
transmitter  
(right)  
and receiver (left).



For fastest service, call toll-free 24 hours day

**800-992-2966**



To order by mail, send check or money order for the total amount including S&H (VA residents add 4.5% sales tax). To charge it to your credit card, enclose account number and exp. date.

COMTRAD INDUSTRIES  
2820 Waterford Lake Dr., Suite 106 Midlothian, VA 23113

"Well, nothing specific. Some things were out of place . . . not where I thought I had left them. And I just had an uneasy feeling all day, like I was being watched. Then, this afternoon, right in front of the apartment, I was almost run down. That could have been an accident, but with what happened to Orson . . ."

"Did you see who was in the car? Did you get the number?"

"No. It all happened too fast."

"You ought to report it to the police."

"I'd feel foolish. I had enough trouble telling you. It was probably an accident."

"I wouldn't count on that. Whoever killed Crouch might have the same reason to want you out of the way. Your boss seems to think some politico who's been a victim of the column might be trying to get even."

"Then why kill Orson—or me? The column always appears under Mr. Gale's byline."

"Yeah, but everyone knows who Gale's eyes and ears are." Not to mention nose and throat. They were all pretty nosy. The throat was Whitley Chandler, Gale's senior leg man and heir apparent who often appeared on the lecture circuit, speaking for Gale and the column. "What about Chandler?" I asked. "Have you

talked to him? Has anyone tried to run him down?"

"No." She paused. "You know, it's funny . . . I haven't talked to him or Mr. Gale since the . . . the incident this afternoon, but when we were talking this morning about Orson, Whitley asked me if I was worried about my own safety. That might have been what made me jumpy all day—that and Orson's death—and then with the accident this afternoon . . ."

"You were spooked, naturally," I said. "But there might be more to it than that. Maybe Chandler wasn't charitably concerned about your state of mind. Maybe he was worried that someone was stalking him, too. After all, Chandler is the most visible of the three of you. If someone set out to eradicate Gale's staff, he would logically be the first target."

"But why would anyone want to do that?"

I didn't have a good answer, so I ate more spaghetti. If an investigative reporter was getting close to a story that somebody didn't want uncovered, that somebody might kill the reporter, but would it be necessary to wipe out his associates as well? If the story had traveled that far, how could you be sure of stopping it? Killing three or four people would only attract attention, and the story

would certainly come out anyhow.

The hell with it. So far the body count was only up to one. Stephanie's "accident" could have been only an accident, and maybe Chandler was genuinely worried about Steph and not himself. And Gale didn't seem to think he was in any danger. When I saw him, he was his usual surly self.

"You're right," I said. "Why would anyone try to kill Gale's whole staff? We're blowing this thing out of all proportion."

After dinner, I wasn't seduced, but we did sit for awhile on the sofa in front of the fireplace. If there had been a fire, romance might have bloomed. But it was summer, so we drank some more wine and talked.

When I left, comfortably full and warmed by the wine, I told Stephanie I would call her the next day. She was much more relaxed than she had been earlier. We had convinced each other that one of Orson's personal enemies, of which there were more than a few, had finally done what most of them had thought of doing more than once. All the rest was just nerves.

The conviction lasted until I got in my car to drive the ten blocks to my house on Twelfth

Street SE. As I pulled away from the curb, the headlights of a car parked down the block came on. They were in my rear view mirror all the way home.

As usual, there was no place to park on the street, and I was faced with the choice of parking in the alley across from my house and risking another ticket or driving around until I found a place a block or two away and maybe getting run down by the mysterious headlights. I opted for the ticket. I still had to get across the street, but at least I wouldn't be out in the open for more than about thirty yards.

The alley ran between Eleventh and Twelfth Streets, and my house was directly opposite the Twelfth Street end. As I emerged from the alley, I looked down Twelfth. Nothing. All quiet. I walked quickly across the street, mounted the front steps of my house, and unlocked the door. Looking over my shoulder, I saw the headlights at the Eleventh Street end of the alley. They moved slowly through the alley, turned right on Twelfth, and sped away. The car was a late model Dodge or Plymouth, a pale color—I couldn't tell what in the dim light of the street. There was no light on the license plate, but I probably



couldn't have read it at that distance anyhow.

I slammed the door behind me and locked it. Then I went over to the coffee table, nervously searched the ashtray for the longest of J. D. Sutton's cigarette butts, straightened it out, and lit up. It tasted nasty. I hadn't smoked for about six months, but this business was undoing my resolve.

In the bright sunshine of the next morning, I felt a little foolish. There had really been no reason to suppose that there was anything sinister in those headlights that had seemed to follow me home. Maybe it was only someone going my way. At worst, it was maybe a police stakeout on Stephanie's apartment. Whoever killed Orson Crouch could have no interest in me. I barely knew the guy.

I plucked the parking ticket off the windshield of my car and put it in the glove compartment with the others. It was early enough that I thought I might still find a parking space in the staff parking lot at First and D Street NE. Staffers who were not high enough up in the hierarchy to rate a reserved parking space got a sticker with a large P on it that allowed them to park in the lot if they could find a space.

I was lucky. There were two or three spaces in the far corner. I parked and hoofed it back across the lot. At the gate was a guardhouse, a small wooden shed, where Sam, the parking lot attendant, was not exactly reading a recent issue of *Playboy*.

"Good morning, Sam."

"Mornin', Mr. Ward," Sam said, tossing aside the magazine.

"Tell me, Sam, were you here the other day when that car was stolen?"

"Nossir. The police been askin' me 'bout that. But ain't nobody complained to me 'bout missin' no car. An' Miss Tobias—she's the lady whose car was stole—I woulda swore she left here like usual 'round five, five thirty." He furrowed his brow and shook his head.

I walked up First Street toward the Old Senate Office Building, now called the Russell Building. Sam was slow-moving, slow-talking, and not exactly a self-starter, but he didn't miss much. If he said Anna Tobias had left in her car, I was inclined to believe it. But what did that mean? Did she drive out to Arlington, run down Crouch, and then report the car stolen? Not likely.

The rest of the day didn't get much better. After a few phone calls I was convinced that the

cloture vote was sure to fail. Some senators will vote against cloture the first time on principle; others will vote against it every time. The main principle, as far as I could see, was that they wanted to have votes on their side if they ever needed to talk a bill to death.

Around noon, I called Lew Nelson, Senator Canaday's legislative assistant, to see if he wanted to grab some lunch.

"I'm on a tight schedule," he said. "We've got a committee hearing this afternoon, and I'm preparing an opening statement for the senator."

"We'll go to the cafeteria," I suggested.

"Okay, but we better make it snappy."

"I'll be by in about two minutes." Senator Canaday's office was only a short distance down the hall.

When I got there, Anna Tobias was at her post at the reception desk talking on the phone. She put down the phone, and I said, "Hi. I hear your car was stolen."

"I got it back."

"A little the worse for wear?"

"Ross, are you here to see Lew? Do you want to go on back, or do you want me to buzz him?"

"Buzz him."

She picked up the phone, punched the intercom button.

"Lew, Ross Ward is here. Okay." She hung up the phone. "He'll be out in a minute." She turned to her typewriter, put on her Dictaphone ears, and began typing.

Apparently she didn't want to talk about her brush with auto theft and homicide. Lew came out in less than a minute, and we set out for the Senate cafeteria in the basement of the New Senate Office Building, nowadays called the Dirksen Building.

There was a pretty good crowd as usual, but the line moved fast. I had the famous Senate Bean Soup, a roll, and a carton of skim milk. Lew had the plate lunch—meatloaf, mashed potatoes, and green beans—and iced tea. It wasn't haute cuisine, but it was cheap.

We found a table in the corner and dug into our chow. I poured my milk into a glass and waited to see if Lew had anything to say. He wasn't very chatty today.

"Anna was awfully surly," I observed, "when I asked her about her car."

"Yeah. I'll tell you about that sometime."

"I've got a minute right now, if you like."

He looked up from his meatloaf, paused, and looked around the room. Four women at the table nearest to us were just

getting up to leave. At the table next to theirs was a group of obvious tourists, complete with cameras. Nobody we knew or likely to know us. Nobody taking any interest in us or in what we were talking about.

"Ross, I'm burned out. I'm going to go back to Arizona to practice law."

"And that's what was eating Anna? I didn't know you two were so chummy," I said, not too sarcastically.

"No, no, I'm fed up with politics, the Senate, delay, hypocrisy, and most of all with Canaday." He tucked into his meatloaf again. I waited. "The business with Anna's car was the last straw." He pushed his plate away. I waited some more. "Canaday has been using Anna's car for his trysts with a woman in Georgetown. Less conspicuous than his Lincoln with Senate plates. Night before last, he called her and said her car had been stolen. He told her to report that it had been stolen from the staff parking lot. Then it turned out the car had been used to murder Orson Crouch. Anna thinks she should tell the police the truth. Canaday has been pressuring her to keep quiet."

After this outburst, Lew clammed up. I didn't have much to say either. He sighed and pushed away from the ta-

ble. "I'd appreciate it if you didn't spread this around."

We walked in silence back to the Old S.O.B.

Back at the office, I found that I had a visitor. Whitley Chandler was sitting in the reception area flipping through an old issue of *Time* magazine. He was a bit more elegantly turned out than your average journalist—light grey, European-cut suit, red silk tie, highly buffed black wingtips. It looked all the more impressive, as, standing up, he unfolded his six foot five frame and extended a large, well manicured hand for me to shake. I'm just under six feet, but he made me feel like a shrimp.

I led him back to my desk and cleared a pile of *Congressional Records* off a straight-backed wooden chair to make room for him to sit. As I settled in behind my grey metal, government-issued desk, I asked, "What can I do for you?"

"Look," he said, "I won't beat around the bush. It's about Orson Crouch. We were working on a story about Senator Canaday." He paused to see my reaction. I tried not to have any.

"We were not quite ready to go with it yet, and now Orson's notes are missing. But I do remember that he had you down as someone he was going to talk

to." Another pause. "Could you tell me what you told him?"

"I never talked to him. Not recently, anyhow."

"But you have talked to Stephanie."

"Not about anything to do with Canaday. Besides, she and Crouch weren't on very good terms. He wouldn't have shared his scoop with her."

"Orson wasn't on very good terms with anybody. Except Gale. He was always sucking up to the old man." He stopped himself and stared at his shoe-shine. I wasn't supposed to have seen that flash of bitterness. "Anyhow, we'd really like to know what happened to his notes."

Eventually, it was obvious that I didn't have anything to tell him. So after a few probing questions about Senator Canaday's private life, to which I had no answers I wanted to give him, he left.

I spent the rest of the afternoon trying to count noses for the upcoming cloture vote. I never got anywhere near the required two-thirds. About five o'clock, I decided to stop beating my head against the wall and went to the Carroll Arms for some Caledonian attitude adjustment.

The Carroll Arms was the restaurant and bar in the old Capitol Hill Hotel, across the

street from the Senate Office Buildings. The hotel was a bit seedy, but the bar was so convenient that it was a popular hangout for senators, staffers, and lobbyists. Much later, after the hotel was defunct, the building housed the Senate Ethics Committee, an irony I never tired of.

I slid in behind a table in the cool, dark bar and waved to Fred, the bartender. He sloshed a generous amount of scotch over some ice and handed the glass to Aggie, who delivered it to my table.

"Here you go, Ross," Aggie said. "You're kinda early today."

"Believe me, if everybody in those offices across the street followed my example, the Republic would still thrive."

"And this gin mill would do a whole lot better, too." Aggie never let anyone have the last word.

I sipped my scotch and tried to get the filibuster out of my mind. So I thought about something more pleasant. I thought about Stephanie. What had her quarrel with Orson Crouch been about? Something to do with the Canaday story that Chandler said they were working on? She had been in Canaday's office that day. What did they have on Canaday? Something to do with his lady friend

in Georgetown? That wasn't much of a story. Sure, it was sort of sleazy, but in those antediluvian days even a columnist like Gale didn't pay much attention to sexual peccadilloes unless there was a political angle.

Thinking about Stephanie had led me into a morass that was just as unpleasant as the filibuster.

"Hi."

I looked up. It was Stephanie. "Hi. I was just thinking about you."

"That's nice, but I thought you were going to call me. Are you going to ask me to sit down?"

"Sorry. I've been preoccupied with Senate business. Pull up a chair. Please."

"Such enthusiasm," she said, sitting in the chair opposite mine.

"I was just wondering, what was your fight with Crouch about the day he was killed?"

"Nothing. Office politics."

"Something to do with the story about Senator Canaday you were working on?"

"No. What story about Canaday?"

"Chandler told me that he and Crouch were working on a story about Canaday. Don't you all work together?"

"That'll be the day. Mr. Gale likes us to compete with one

another. He says it makes us sharper."

"Mmm . . . but Chandler said Crouch's notes for a story they were doing on Canaday were missing."

"Whitley Chandler has been digging up something on Canaday, but he wouldn't have let Orson in on it. That was his baby."

"So what was Crouch working on? What is Chandler looking for?"

"Job security, probably, like everybody who ever worked for Preston Gale. Like I said, Mr. Gale likes for us to compete. We're like a bunch of schoolkids trying to impress the teacher . . . and none of us, I'm ashamed to admit, is above trying to steal the others' work."

We sat at that table for another forty-five minutes. I bought Stephanie a couple of gin and tonics, and she lost most of her reserve. She painted a pretty grim picture of what it was like to work for Preston Gale. He treated his employees even worse than he treated the victims of his column. He played them off against one another, threatened them with dismissal, and praised and rewarded any underhanded tactic so long as it worked. She told, for example, how Crouch had once plied a notoriously alcoholic congress-



man with liquor at lunch just so he could describe the old gent showing up drunk on the floor of Congress for a vote that afternoon. Gale had loved that.

In fact, according to Stephanie, Crouch had become the apple of Gale's eye, "teacher's pet," she said. Stephanie herself was never sufficiently ruthless to suit Gale, but she felt he tolerated her because she was a woman. And that really got under her skin. She was ready to quit, but Whitley Chandler had persuaded her to hang on. When Gale retired or died, Chandler would be in charge of the column, and things would be different.

I listened sympathetically to all this, sipping my scotch and wondering what it was about me that inspired people to spill their guts, first Lew Nelson at lunch and now Stephanie at the cocktail hour. Who would it be for dinner?

I drove home and found a parking space on the street near my house for a change. I was going to make an early evening of it. Have a bite to eat, read for awhile, and go to bed. I fried some bacon, scrambled some eggs, and settled down in front of the television set to watch the news. Nothing new. The troop buildup was beginning in Southeast Asia, the fil-

ibuster was continuing in the Senate, LBJ was vigorously twisting senatorial arms. The bombshell was the final item. Nationally syndicated columnist Preston Gale had been found murdered in his Bethesda, Maryland, home. No further details were immediately available. Goodnight, David. Goodnight, Chet.

I almost choked on my eggs. What was going on? The murder of Gale had to be connected to the murder of Orson Crouch. But how? I turned off the television and thought about it for awhile. Could it be Senator Canaday or some other victim of Gale's column? Maybe even some other politician who had been unelected or spent time in stir as a result of Gale's work? But if revenge was the motive, why would the murderer start with a grunt like Crouch? Gale was the real power and the natural target. So maybe Crouch knew something that the murderer wanted to keep quiet. So Crouch was killed, but then Gale found out what Crouch knew, and he had to be killed, too.

And then I knew. Well, I didn't actually know, but I felt it in my guts. I needed more information to say confidently that I knew. I picked up the phone and dialed Stephanie's number. Busy. I paced for a

couple of minutes and tried again. Still busy.

I decided to drive over to see her, although I hated to give up a good parking place. Stephanie's apartment was near the southwest corner of Stanton Park, at Maryland and Fourth Street, so I had to make a circuit of the park to get there. From the far side of the park, I spotted the powder blue 1964 Dodge sedan at the curb in front of Stephanie's building. Instead of turning on Fourth Street to get to Stephanie's, I continued on Mass. Ave. and looked for a pay phone.

I didn't find one, so when I got to D Street, I parked at a fire hydrant near the Monocle and ducked in to use their phone. I called the D.C. police and caught O'Brien just as he was leaving for the day.

"O'Brien, I think I'm onto something you might want to know."

"What? We talked to you for an hour already. You don't know diddly."

"That was yesterday. I'm a fast learner."

"Fine. Then you probably know that Anna Tobias's car was stolen in Georgetown and not on the Hill, and you probably know why. So if you want, you can talk to Officer Bagley here and learn why we don't care who Senator Canaday is

screwing as long as it's not the citizens."

"Okay. Maybe Officer Bagley would like to see his name on the front page of the paper tomorrow as the guy who nabbed the murderer of Preston Gale."

That got him. I gave him the address, and he said he would meet me at Stephanie's apartment. Maybe I could have saved myself a lot of trouble by reporting a crime in progress. After all, I was parked at a fire hydrant.

When I got to Stephanie's, I didn't wait for O'Brien. I probably should have. I rang the bell. Stephanie cracked open the door with the security chain on. She looked haggard. Her dark hair was drawn into a knot at the nape of her neck. Her mascara had run and her eyes looked sunken. She seemed very pale in the artificial light of the entryway.

"Hello, Ross," she said, trying to fake a smile. "Could you come back some other time? I... I'm not very good company right now."

"Sorry, Steph," I said, "but I have to talk to you now. It's important."

She closed the door to undo the chain, and when she opened it again, I saw over her shoulder just what I had expected. The enormous figure of

Whitley Chandler seemed to fill the center of her living room.

"I see you've got company," I said. "Hello, Chandler. Is that your Dodge out front?"

Stephanie looked at me quizzically. Chandler frowned.

"Whitley came over to tell me about Mr. Gale. Have you heard?"

"Yeah," I said. "How much did he tell you?"

"Just that Mr. Gale had been strangled by an intruder in his home."

"That's more than Huntley and Brinkley knew," I pointed out. Chandler tensed. He continued to stare at me. "What did Crouch have on you, Chandler?" I asked. Stephanie looked from one of us to the other in astonishment.

Here was a guy who had brutally run down a colleague and apparently throttled his boss with his bare hands. And I was threatening him, but I didn't expect violence. How dumb can you get?

I had turned to Stephanie to explain what I thought had happened, when Chandler sprang at me. We rolled around on the floor, knocking over an end table and lamp, and Chandler came out on top with his knees on my stomach and his huge hands wrapped around my throat. The world went red and then black.

The next thing I heard was O'Brien's voice. "Oops, sorry," he said. "Don't let me interrupt." Stephanie was kneeling over me administering mouth-to-mouth resuscitation. Chandler was stretched out full length in the middle of the living room. Stephanie had laid him out with the fireplace poker.

It was all pretty clear when you thought about it. The first tipoff was the fact that Chandler had been investigating Senator Canaday. Naturally he would have known about the senator's girlfriend in Georgetown. Very convenient. Right across Key Bridge from the Arlington Towers. He could steal the car with the assurance that it would not be missed immediately and that, even if it was, Canaday would be reluctant to report the theft. Maybe eventually Chandler could even write a story linking Senator Canaday to the stolen car and the murder of Orson Crouch. Gale would have loved that.

But why should Chandler want to kill Crouch? Gale liked his leg men to compete, and Crouch competed too effectively. He was edging out Chandler for Gale's favor. Chandler had devoted his career to Gale and expected to inherit the column with its two

hundred paper syndication when Gale retired. As Crouch rose in the boss's favor, Chandler saw his whole career slipping away. I inferred all of this, more or less, from what Stephanie had told me about "office politics."

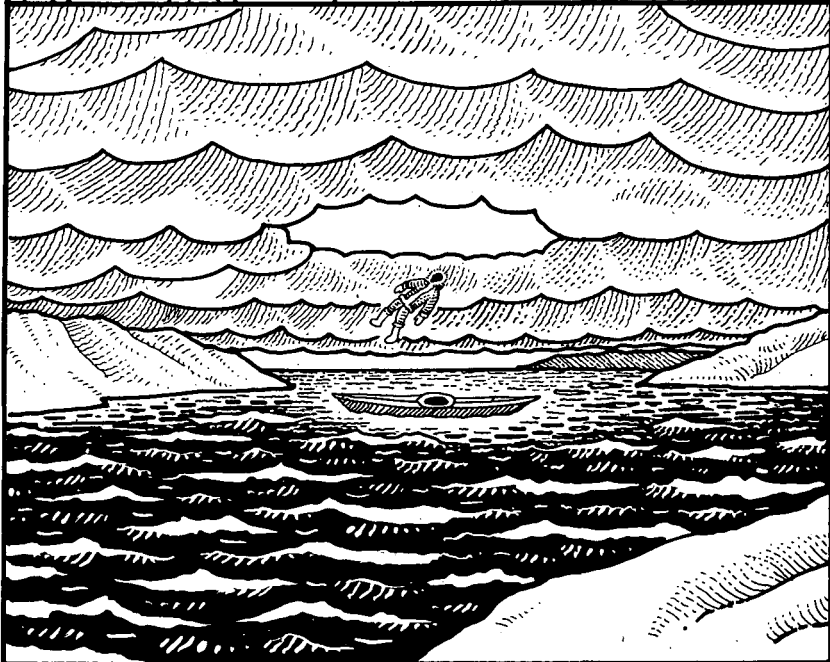
What I had only guessed was that Crouch had had something on Chandler. Something that would make Crouch heir apparent and leave Chandler out in the cold. After all, what was Chandler looking for when he told me Crouch's notes for the Canaday story were missing? Crouch wasn't in on the Canaday story. Had Chandler searched Stephanie's apartment for whatever it was? She said she felt someone had been through her things. And, oh yeah, the car that almost ran down Stephanie—that was, in fact, only an accident.

I didn't find out what Crouch had on Chandler until later. Chandler, in his travels around the country, had been quietly lobbying editors of papers that carried the column. He had convinced a number of them that it would be a better column when the old man retired. At his suggestion, some of them were beginning to put pressure on the syndicate to get Gale out.

Chandler could probably have struck out on his own, made a deal with the syndicate, and started his own column. But it took a long time to build up the kind of following that Gale had, especially competing head-to-head with the older, more familiar column.

Crouch had found out what Chandler was up to and had written a story. He was waiting for the optimum moment to present the story to Gale. How Gale finally got the story, I never found out. It was in Chandler's coat pocket when the police searched him. Stephanie ran it in the column, where it appeared under the headline "How Sharper Than a Serpent's Tooth . . ."

It all goes to show that journalists are even harder to shut up than senators. When the cloture vote was held the next day, we won with two votes to spare. In all my nose counting, I hadn't adequately reckoned on the persuasive powers of LBJ. The president had applied his patent mixture of praise and promises, pork and punishment, and sixty-nine senators agreed it was time to end the debate.



# THE WORD FOR BREAKING AUGUST SKY

**James Sarafin**



27

**T**igges stopped the Blazer in front of the hotel and looked across the darkening waters of the Sound to the body floating offshore. He was interested but not surprised to find a dead man out there. Tigges had been a cop a long time, and the Inupiat Eskimo village of Nuyaqpalik, Alaska, hadn't seen a killing, suicide, or accidental death for almost four months.

He flipped up his parka hood and got out; rain drummed around his ears as he crossed the street to the narrow gravel beach. Four streetlamps illuminated the beach in front of the hotel, and he put their glare behind him. In the streetlamp light the sheening rain made lines against the dark, seeming to fall in continuous streams instead of drops. The rain-lines bent sideways to the wind, saturating his trousers below the parka.

From the high edge of the beach he could see the clear outline of the body, seeming to float above the waves as it drifted northwest past the long, barren hills that lay across the Sound. Clouds had sunk over the tops of the hills and nearly to the sea, making everything darker than it should have been on an August evening above the Arctic Circle.

The sound of high-revving boat engines emerged out of the rain. Two open-decked aluminum skiffs rounded the point. They rode high in the water, so neither had made a good catch. One was overtaking the other, with a larger or newer outboard. As they came down the beach opposite Tigges, running close together, he could hear the crews exchanging taunts and curses.

The boat nearer shore went through the floating body right at windshield level. Without any of the men noticing or the boat disturbing the body's course. Now Tigges was surprised: a vision of the dead, distinct from the person who was going to die? He had never seen a simple ghost before.

Gravel crunched behind him, then Charlie Henderson's voice: "The council sent me to see if you found the mayor yet." Tigges hadn't noticed the second vehicle's arrival.

With his back to the streetlights, Henderson's features still showed under his hat. Tigges knew his own face, darker than the Eskimo's, would not show anything beneath his hood—except maybe the gleam of his teeth if he smiled, which he seldom did and wasn't doing now.

"Looks like we just found him." Tigges pointed to the

faster boat, which had pulled ahead and was angling toward the beach. One of the men aboard raised his middle finger at the other boat, which continued south, paralleling the shore.

Tigges and his deputy watched the mayor and his crew come ashore. When he'd first come on the job, Tigges had to go find Officer Henderson in the bar. Charlie had been drunk ever since losing his younger brother in a boating accident for which he blamed himself. Once Tigges managed to sober him up, Henderson had turned out to be a good cop and hadn't touched the bottle for over a year.

"The squatters will probably leave soon, since they're not catching much." Tigges gestured at the white men's boat, still heading south. At first everyone had thought the salmon were just late, but now it looked like there weren't going to be many at all this year.

Henderson shrugged, worked a stone free with his foot, and sent it tumbling down the steep, narrow beach. "Most of them don't even go out any more, just hang around camp drinking."

He hadn't seemed to notice the body, floating higher, less substantial than the air. But he had once told Tigges that Inu-

piats can see ghosts, that he had once seen his own younger brother trying to talk to him. If Henderson couldn't see this one, it must be Tigges's own vision after all. But who? Always before, he had been able to tell who was going to die, and how. And when; when he saw it, death always came soon.

Flying a transport chopper in Lift Company, Vietnam, '70 and '71, Roger Tigges had seen plenty of the dead. The dead and the soon-to-be-dead—hauling the one out and the other back in-country. On a pickup, when Tigges would drop in fast toward the signal smoke, their bodies leaking blood, flesh and clothing charred by hot metal. Or lying in the paddies when there was no smoke, eyeholes staring into the sky, faces turning black in the sun. Some found with hardly a mark on them, looking as if they had surrendered life without a struggle, had just rolled over quietly in the foxhole or taken time to lay down their arms and sit against a tree to rest.

Then were the dead who fought for every scrap of their lives being torn away like a sheet, screaming, crying, begging, cursing. Shivering like a fish on a deck, flopping two feet in the air despite medics trying to hold them down.



Sometimes, flying back to base with them stacked three deep on the deck of his Huey, he heard them through the body bags and over the whine of the turbines, trying to get out, straining to break free even from their lifeless flesh.

After a time the dead and soon-to-be-dead merged in Tigges's mind. He didn't know it until he climbed aboard at base and noticed his door gunner slumped against the open hatch, leaking red from his throat. Tigges grabbed him, trying to staunch the blood, yelling for a medic. But the gunner only pushed him away. "You crazy, man? Let go of me!" Not a mark on him, no sign of blood any more. Tigges thought he'd hallucinated—until, on return from the mission, enemy fire laced out of the forest canopy. A few rounds clanged into the cabin, a groan came over his headset. He turned and found the gunner slumped dead, just as he'd seen him before.

Later he noticed that if he looked right at the troops as they climbed aboard, he could see who was going to be killed and how. The word spread: don't mess with that black pilot, he looks at you, your number is up. Tigges didn't know when he would see death coming, only knew he couldn't stop

it, once seen. No warning ever worked. He had never found the right words to save someone's life. He only had the future of the dead.

At least here in Nuyaaqpalik, he'd found people who believed in the dead.

"Think the council's going to do anything about them?" Henderson was saying.

"Don't know what they can do." The wind gusted a hard burst of rain against Tigges's back. He watched the body, someone's ghost of the future, rise until it disappeared in the clouds. "Why don't you see if the mayor needs a ride to the meeting," he said. "Tell him I'll meet him there, Charlie."

Tigges turned to go back to his late-model Blazer the town had bought with a state grant, still new enough to show it in a place where the roads and weather made a vehicle with twenty thousand miles look like it had rolled over the odometer. Halfway across the street, something hit him about what he had just called Officer Henderson.

He turned and said, "Don't take this wrong, but I was wondering: why do your people use whiteman names?" For Tigges had just been struck by the power of words.

For a moment Henderson made no reply, his face and

whole body frozen. He finally responded without looking around.

"I don't know, ask my grandmother. Maybe we don't want them to know our real ones." Then Henderson, still watching the horizon, where the sky showed that unchanging twilight gray of weather turned bad at the end of summer, asked, "Why do yours?"

Tigges drove slowly on the shore road, trying to work out Charlie's meaning. Had he returned Tigges's question seriously, mockingly, or simply to exercise his dry Inupiat humor? In the last two years Charlie had become the closest thing Tigges had to a friend, but sometimes he was no less unfathomable than the rest of his people.

Tigges had gone into police work out of Nam, and worked his way up to a lieutenancy in Los Angeles, which most of his colleagues considered a minority promotion. When his wife left him, he drifted north to the Bellevue, Washington, force. Two years later he applied for a job advertised in the newspaper: chief of police for Nuyaqpalik, which on the map looked like one end of the world. All Tigges knew when he accepted the job was that it had no road

to anyplace else and that whites were the minority.

Now, taking the long way to the city office, Tigges wished Henderson were sitting in the other seat. At least they had to catch my great-great-what-ever-grandmother back in Africa, he imagined himself saying. She didn't take the name in trade, along with some whiteman junk and a bottle of booze. And keep trading on the names for more junk and booze until you've got off-the-chart murder, suicide, and accident rates, in a town with maybe three thousand people in summers when there's work.

He found himself driving faster, the Blazer bouncing hard on the water-hidden ruts. After three days' incessant rain, the gravel road no longer made a normal crunching sound, only squishing under the tires. The worn wipers smeared the water, thick, viscous, as if it were oil poured onto the windshield. As the street narrowed, he passed cabins, shacks, and shanties that would have been condemned in any real town, patched and held together with pieces of wood, tin, vinyl sheeting, and anything else that could be nailed together. At least the rain had drowned the leaking septic smells. Vinyl sheeting and septic systems—more bor-

rowed words for whiteman junk.

A late tour bus from the airport blocked most of the road ahead to let its load of white retirees take pictures, despite the rain and poor light. The big attraction seemed to be the empty fish racks and a caribou hide someone had left hanging over a fence rail to rot in the rain. Through the steamy bus windows, Tigges watched them pointing and gawking, until the driver finally pulled over to let him pass.

When he pulled up to the city office, the lights were on in the conference room, and the other police Blazer was already parked by the door. He found Charlie reading an old issue of *Scientific American* in the reception area and sent him home. They were finishing roll call as Tigges took a seat. The warmth of the room made his eyes droop as the meeting dragged through various agenda items that might have arisen in any small town. After a time he was brought awake by the anger in the mayor's voice:

"It's the same problem every summer—those damn squatters. They come to town, camp on people's land, dump their trash. The time has come for the city to take a stand. And

the chief of police is here tonight to tell us what he can do."

Tigges leaned back in the folding steel chair and looked at the ceiling. They had been through this before, both prior summers of his term. "We got them off private property last year, but now they're on state land. The airport manager says they have as much right to be there as anyone else, long as they don't interfere with runway operations."

"The airport beach is a cultural site," said another member. "Our ancestors' bones are buried there. The squatters dig up the ground, for their trash and latrines."

Tigges started to look, then rolled his eyes back to the ceiling. He didn't like to look at people directly. Never knew who might be dead already, but not know it yet.

"The young people are angry," the mayor said. "Talking about busting up their camp."

"Well, don't encourage them," Tigges replied. "We haven't had anyone in jail all month, and I'd like to keep it that way."

The council was silent until the mayor said, "Why can't you arrest the squatters for loitering or something?"

That's what's wrong with this place, Tigges thought. The Eskimos in charge act just like

the white man. "Because we can't discriminate against non-residents," he said. "Look, they'll soon be going back upriver to their cabins for the winter. You could pass an emergency ordinance closing bars and liquor stores, just to help things cool down in the meantime."

The white woman, wife of the local Presbyterian minister, nodded, but the white man and three Inupiat on the council, including the mayor, owned interests in the town's liquor establishments. "That wouldn't help the local economy," said Briggs, the white man. "And it sounds unconstitutional."

"You can do it as a temporary public safety measure." Tigges almost forgot and looked at him but quickly shifted his eyes away.

"Well, Roger, with all due respect, you're not a lawyer. I think the city better check with counsel first, so we don't wind up in a suit brought by local businesses."

"I'll call our law firm tomorrow," said the mayor. "Maybe they'll say we can bring a nuisance suit or something." Most of the council nodded. Of course, by the time the mayor got a legal opinion the squatters would be long gone, and no one would worry about them again until next summer.

The rain ebbed and flowed, but the weather did not change. Early the following afternoon Tigges found himself answering a complaint phoned in by one of the squatters from the airport manager's office. He drove down a narrow road located just above the high tide line on the beach, though not beyond reach of the winter storms that soon would send sheets of ice crashing across the end of the runway. Gusts of wind and rain bucked the side of his truck. Beyond the runway the road quickly deteriorated into a muddy, rutted track, and he shifted into four-wheel drive.

He saw the fire down the beach, figures seated around it, and, as he got out, heard the murmur of voices carried on the wind. No laughter, just subdued talking—which cut off completely as they noticed Tigges.

The squatters camped in faded tents or under vinyl sheets spread over driftwood. They had a big blue plastic tarp set up next to the fire. The men stood up as he approached. Some had brought their families, women and children huddled around the fire. A woman sat in the entrance of one of the tents, holding a baby. Tigges stopped under the tarp, glad for

anything that relieved the relentless pressure of the rain.

"They just came roaring in on their ATV's. Knocking over our tents, chasing people, scaring hell out of our kids." The speaker was a big, redheaded, bearded man in his mid-thirties. He pointed out the tracks, not yet washed away. His face was flushed, and Tigges smelled the booze.

"We've been coming here to fish for years," another man said. "We've got as much right as any natives."

Others cursed in assent. There wasn't much more to the story. No one had been hurt. Tigges promised to look into it.

"Sure you will!" the big man said as Tigges walked back to the Blazer. "Just tell them if they come back, we'll be ready."

Tigges didn't need witness descriptions. He drove past the runway, the first shanties at the south of town, the hotel, and all the way to the dock on the north. There he turned away from shore, past vacant, flooded lots furrowed by vehicles shortcutting the intersection. He slowed as he passed the Seal and Harpoon bar. There were only two cars parked outside, so he didn't bother going in.

He found them coming out of the general store. Four boys in their teens or early twenties,

led by Jimmy Tallman and his younger brother, whose name Tigges couldn't remember. Related—nephews or something—to the mayor. Tigges parked in front of their ATV's and got out.

"Heard you've been harassing the squatters."

Jimmy threw a leg over his ATV, leaned, and spat a thin stream of tobacco juice onto the ground. "Squatters?"

"Look, kid, just don't go riding down on the airport beach for awhile."

"This is Indian country, man." Jimmy's black eyes were expressionless. "We go where we want."

Suddenly Tigges saw Jimmy lying on the ground, trying to raise his torso and coughing bright red froth. On his side, under one outflung arm, a hole the size of a golf ball blossomed blood, bits of lung tissue, and bone fragments from a rib. Bullet wound. Tigges held himself, careful to show no reaction until the vision passed.

"You want something else? Officer?" Jimmy was back on his seat, looking ready to spit again.

Tigges tried to find the right words. "You boys stay away from that squatter camp, or someone's liable to get hurt. If I find out you've been down there

again, well, you're old enough to spend a night in jail."

But he knew he couldn't stop it, and the futility must have shown on his face. As he turned back to the Blazer, Jimmy mumbled some remark at his back, and the other boys laughed. Street punks, Tigges thought, they're the same everywhere. Usually just get what's coming to them anyway.

The ambulance hadn't been able to make it down the rutted track, but by then there was no reason to hurry. The .30-06 soft-point had taken him side to side, through both lungs. His ATV was stalled out against a partially flattened tent several feet away. Tigges and Henderson took photographs of the scene and witness statements from the squatters. Everyone had heard the shot, but no one admitted seeing anything. They wrapped Jimmy's body in a tarp and hauled it out to the waiting ambulance. The suspect was already secure in Tigges's jail.

Tigges and Henderson stood on the road as the ambulance left. The rain had subsided to a drizzle, although the low clouds still hid the horizon in every direction but seaward. The treeless tundra along the road showed a uniform dull brown, displaying none of the myriad

colors of tiny flowers and turning leaves that would have been revealed in good daylight.

"I keep hoping for a break in the sky," Tigges said. "They say weather affects people's moods. If it doesn't let up, there's liable to be more killing."

Henderson studied the seaward horizon. "Do you know the story about when the sky really did break open here? Funny, what you said just made it pop into my head."

Tigges shook his head and waited, nothing better to do than go back to the office and start his report.

"Long ago, before the whites came, the village once had a very hard winter," Henderson began. "Not much salmon in the fall, and they killed only a few seals all winter. By spring a lot of people had starved. One man, Nyluk, lost his whole family, and the ghosts of his wife, children, and parents haunted his house every night. He saw them but couldn't talk to them."

"One day Nyluk and another man went hunting seals in kayaks, past the ice offshore. They came to this place where the water was calm and the sky came down close, right overhead. Then they noticed the sky had broken open just above. Nyluk stood up, careful, in his kayak and put his head through the break in the sky."

He saw a place that was warm and sunny, with flowers on the ground and bushes full of berries. Fish and game everywhere, just waiting to be caught. He tried to call to his friend, to tell him that the sky was better than living on the earth.

"But his friend couldn't hear him, and when he saw Nyluk disappear into the sky, he paddled back to the village, fast as he could. The men all came back in their kayaks, but the sky was high above, not broken open like before. They found his kayak, but no sign of Nyluk. But then they found his body when they went back to the village, in his house. He had died that morning, before the hunt, but nobody knew it. Even Nyluk didn't know it. It was his ghost that went seal hunting. Ever since then, Nyluk is supposed to live in the sky, where he is always warm and is never hungry.

"My grandfather told me that when I was a boy." Charlie shrugged. "But people don't tell the old stories much any more."

No one had ever told Tigges an Eskimo story. What if it's true, he thought. That the dead do go into the sky from here. He looked out at the Sound, wondering again whom he had seen drifting there, up into the clouds. Not Jimmy Tallman, at

least. Tigges had seen that boy dead like so many others, shot and lying in the mud.

Coming back by the airstrip, they passed two squatters, a man and a woman, walking to town.

"That's his wife, with the baby," Henderson said. "And the other man that lives with them. His younger brother, I think. Must be going to see him in jail."

The squatter sat in the cell, staring at nothing until he heard Tigges and stood up. Tall, skinny blond man, with a beard and long hair ponytailed in the back, like the hippies used to wear. Maybe news of the flower children has just made it up here, Tigges thought. Or this is where they all went. Alaskan hippie, the kind who'll blow a man away for messing with his property.

"We need to fish to get us and the dogs through winter," the white man said. "That beach is the only place we got left." As if he actually believed he had been arrested for trespass. Tigges couldn't recall seeing him in the camp before. He had given his residence as "twenty-four miles up the Noatak River."

"I just want to know about the shooting," Tigges said. He



had read the man his Miranda at the time of arrest.

"I already told you, it was self-defense. Or defense of family. That's the same thing, ain't it?"

"Just tell me what happened."

The man's eyes narrowed, and he sat back down on the bunk. "No, I'm going to wait for my lawyer. I got that much rights."

The public defender and assistant D.A. weren't due into town until Monday. Then maybe the judge would change the trial venue to Nome or Barrow.

Tigges could see Henderson holding the phone and waving at him through the wire-reinforced office window.

"It's the mayor," Henderson told him as he unlocked the door. "They're holding an emergency council meeting right now, and he wants to know if you can make it."

"Tell him I'm coming," Tigges said, and, after Henderson had hung up, "This'll probably last a while. Be sure to search his visitors when they get here."

"The baby, too?" Henderson asked, in that tone that could have been serious, mocking, or humorous. Tigges could never tell.

Out in the pickup Tigges thought, certainly, damn it!

The kid's blankets at least. He paused with his foot on the brake, then took it off. Hell, I can't babysit all the time.

The meeting produced nothing more than a protest letter to the state, holding the airport manager responsible for a human death and demanding that people not be allowed to camp on native cultural sites.

"Margie Tallman's oldest boy gets shot right off his ATV, just for bumping into one of their tents, and we can't do anything else?" the mayor yelled.

"You can close the bars and liquor stores," Tigges said. But there was only more yelling and arguing until the meeting finally broke up around nine o'clock.

The rain still streamed on Tigges's windshield. This late, it was just about dark, real night, the cloudbanks closing off the last of the late-summer night's twilight. Back at the office he found that the squatter's visitors had come, the brother now gone but the wife still sitting in the little one-couch lobby. She had red hair over green, wide-set eyes, a figure that looked too petite for living in tents and hauling fish into a boat, and a face that was probably pretty once, five or ten years ago when she married him down in Oklahoma or

Texas or wherever, before coming north to live in the bush. She rocked her baby, who was waking fitfully from a nap.

He could feel her eyes on his back all the way to the office, where Henderson was reading *Time*. The arrest report lay unfinished on the desk, and Tigges picked it up but couldn't give attention to the words. In the lobby the woman undid the buttons of her wool shirt to feed the baby. Tigges looked quickly over at Henderson, who happened to glance up from the magazine at the same time.

"Where'd the other one go? The brother?"

"Don't know," Henderson said. "Looked like he might want to get a drink. Maybe down to the 'Poon."

"Did you search him?"

"Yeah. He had him a knife."

"What happened to it?"

"Gave it back when he left."

"God damn it, Charlie! You give him back his knife and send him off to a bar?"

Charlie put down the magazine. "Well, we didn't arrest him, and I didn't think we had any right to keep it. You like for us to go by the book."

"A good cop would find some excuse, at least until he left town. We can use police discretion to prevent violent situations." Tigges picked up his nightstick and took his rain

parka from the coat rack. "I'd better get down there." He turned around and stopped.

He saw Charlie slumped sideways on ice-crusting gravel, mouth agape, pale with frost that coated his face. Bottle in a brown paper bag clutched tightly to his chest. Oh no, Charlie! Passed out drunk until you freeze—not that way! It made him mad, too mad to say anything aloud to his friend.

It was useless to say anything anyway. He couldn't stand to look at Charlie like that, and went out, past the couch, not looking at the woman either but hearing the muffled sucking of the baby at her nipple. Before the door closed behind him, the phone rang twice until Henderson picked it up.

As Tigges drove down the street, he noticed the wipers scraping on a dry windshield and turned them off. There were a lot of cars and ATV's in front of the bar this time of night. He pulled into a vacant space across the street and shut down the Blazer. The rain had finally stopped, but the wind still slapped his parka in dying gusts coming up the street from shore. Across the Sound the sky seemed to be growing brighter, as if the bank of clouds was lifting there. A white couple walked quickly

out of the bar, looked at him, and went on to their pickup.

He knew it had gone wrong as soon as he opened the door because of the ring of silent faces around the bar. The bartender was on the phone but watching the door. He pointed to the back of the room as soon as he saw Tigges.

Tigges pushed his way through the crowd to where the two men fought panting on the floor, their legs kicking themselves around slowly in a circle as if they were a single wounded animal. They had wound up as unskilled or drunken fighters usually do, wrestling mostly, locked too close, each flailing at the other's back. Left to themselves they could probably go on that way until exhausted without causing any real damage, so long as they didn't start biting.

Tigges grabbed the long hair of the Eskimo, hauled him up, and saw it was the other Tallman boy, who was maybe too young to have been in the place to begin with. "Get up," he said to the squatter. "You're both under arrest."

The Tallman boy spat something in Inupiaq, then, "Not in the same jail as him!"

The squatter got to his feet, still panting and shaking like an animal, a bloody smear under his nose. "All I done was

come in for a beer and they jumped me. Don't a white man have any rights in this town?" He didn't look like he was out of his teens either.

"Coming in here wasn't very smart after what your brother did," Tigges said. He started them both toward the door.

"I tried to tell them. The baby was in that tent."

"That doesn't sound very smart either." Tigges wasn't thinking about the conversation but about getting them outside, where he could frisk and cuff them before anyone else got involved. They reached the door, and Tigges pushed the Tallman boy out, his left hand still on the shoulder of the squatter beside him.

"It was raining, where was she supposed to put him, you dumb nigger!"

"Tannik!"

The second word came out of the crowd behind him in almost the same breath, a name he had heard before, too, but only in this place and not with the old familiarity as the one uttered by the white man. A name that, ever since the first whaling ships had come out of the Bering Sea to this muddy spit of land, had been what they called the whites who had brought them drink and taken everything else. And Tigges, astonished to think it had been

directed at him, turned to see who had spat out that word.

Turned into the blade so that it pierced his back just above the belt, the white boy's fist around the knife handle slapping his parka, the force of the blow and his own convulsive jerk propelling him through the door in a long, long fall.

He had never felt anything like the unbelievable, paralyzing pain, so strong it wouldn't let him cry out. He saw his hand lying next to his face but couldn't move it to get up. He heard the faraway sound of feet scattering stones in both directions on the street. He hadn't felt his face hit the gravel parking lot, he only knew he was lying there when he tried to breathe and took in a mouthful of muddy water. He struggled, managed a convulsion that turned him farther onto his side.

Must have taken it right in the kidney, he thought. The pain began to spread into a numbness radiating from his back. He saw the shrinking form of the Tallman boy under the streetlights, running toward shore.

Wonder where he expects to hide? No sooner had the thought come than Tigges was up and following, moving smoothly along the street. A light seemed to go with him, il-

luminating the houses and buildings he passed. There was no pain at all any more; Tigges felt fine. He saw the boy disappear into one of the little shanties a block from the beach.

Why did he go in there? As Tigges thought it, he moved toward the house and went inside; he wasn't sure how, since he didn't use the door. The boy was yelling in Inupiaq and shaking a woman asleep on a couch, beside a near-empty whisky bottle. His mother?

The woman awoke and said, "Jimmy?" Then looked at her other son, alive, and started crying, eyes screwed tight and the big tears squeezing out and falling with soft popping sounds, as if they were little bird eggs breaking on the peeling linoleum floor.

An older woman came out of a back bedroom. The boy started to speak, but the old woman saw Tigges and let out a scream. The boy looked, and he and both women started yelling and screaming. Tigges left quickly.

I shouldn't have just walked into their house, he thought. Wonder where the other one's going? As he thought this, he was moving the other way along the street. Could see better higher up—and he floated up. He knew he ought to feel strange about that, but didn't.

He spotted the white boy running toward the airport beach, where his boat was anchored. As if he could hide twenty-four miles up the Noatak.

Tigges felt he could go anywhere, felt he was going to go somewhere, knew the need to move on. But there seemed to be something he hadn't done yet. He wondered what was happening back at the bar, and found himself going that way, the wash of light flowing ahead of him. When he got there, he heard a familiar voice yelling.

"Don't stare at him! Get out of here, shut that door!" It was Charlie. Now Tigges knew it had something to do with Charlie, what he had to do. The other people went back inside the bar, and Charlie knelt down beside a dark form lying in the front door, holding it, rocking and moaning, "My fault, my fault."

Tigges moved closer to see, but Charlie noticed the light and looked up first, right at him. Charlie straightened, and Tigges saw the body's face was his own.

"I'm sorry I got you killed, Roger," Charlie said. "I should have taken his knife, like you said."

Tigges tried to tell him no, but couldn't. He tried again, but couldn't make a sound.

"It's my fault, just like with my brother!"

Tigges saw his own body and moved toward it. It was still warm, and he found his way back inside. His vision was very fuzzy, looking up at Charlie's face under the front door light. He couldn't feel anything in his hands or feet or anywhere. He concentrated on his mouth, tried to move it. His tongue felt thick and numb.

"Nnnnnno," he finally managed. His vision cleared as he gained his voice. "You warned . . . about knife. I screwed up, big time. Got careless, that's all."

A siren opened up in the distance, erupting out of the hospital garage at the other end of town. "Hang in there, Roger," Charlie told him. "Paramedics'll be here in a minute."

"Had to . . . tell you. Not your fault." Tigges looked directly at him . . . and saw Charlie a lot older, gray hair, slightly stooped—still here in the village, right here, looking down at this spot of ground. Then Tigges at last let his eyes roll away.

Head lying cradled in Charlie's lap, looking down the street toward shore, Tigges saw the bright patch of sky where the clouds were breaking apart to the northwest, and thought he saw all the way to the long,

lightening hills across the Sound, their color already turning with fall, the tundra red and gold.

"Charlie?" he whispered; but then his voice failed. He wanted to ask the name of the story about the broken sky.

"Karuk," Henderson said. "My name is Karuk."

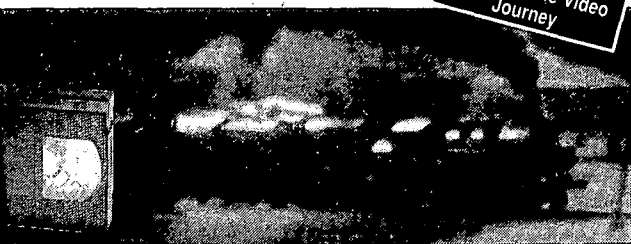
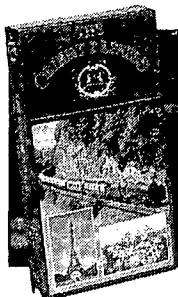
Tigges tried again to speak, but it was too late. Because looking across the water called him away from his body again.

Without looking back at his friend or even the emptiness of his own face, he floated down the street in a wave of light that illuminated the shanties, all the ones he knew and ones he had never noticed before, past where the land merged into the sea, rising slowly over the waves chopping parallel to shore, across the dark silty waters of the Sound, and up into the breaking August sky that only the Eskimos could name.

*Important Notice to Subscribers: All subscription orders and mail regarding subscriptions should be sent to P.O. Box 5124, Harlan, Iowa 51593-5124. For change of address, please advise six to eight weeks before moving. Send us your current mailing label with new address. Call 800-333-3311 with questions about your subscription.*

# Ride The ORIENT EXPRESS

An Incredible Video Journey



## The Greatest Train Ride Ever Filmed!

Climb aboard the world's most intriguing train and enjoy the travel adventure of a lifetime. The Orient Express, now restored to its original splendor, takes you on a glorious five-day tour which sweeps across Europe and ends at the fabled city of Istanbul.

### Enjoy Marvelous Panoramas

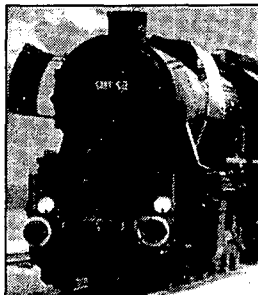
Magnificent mountains, rivers, the delightful Vienna Woods... Relax and enjoy a marvelous panorama as the great blue train hurtles across an ever-changing landscape. Imagine your seat mate is a famous passenger of yesteryear—King Leopold perhaps, or Toscanini or Agatha Christie. Narrated and photographed by film maker Kathleen Dusek, this unique video evokes the charm of a fascinating bygone era.

### The Ultimate In Luxury

Now a priceless museum piece, the Orient Express makes its historic run only twice a year. What a privilege to be aboard—to experience the world-class meals, the meticulous service, and the warmth of new-found friendships. Watch as the train is prepared for journey, and as it is pulled over the mountains by antique steam engines... An unforgettable delight for train buffs.

### Great Historic Cities

Savor the wonders of Paris, Munich, Salzburg, Vienna, Budapest, Bucharest, and exotic Istanbul. This trip follows the route of the original run in 1886. But it lasts 5 days instead of the customary 73 hours, allowing time for some brief, fascinating stop-overs. Enjoy a sumptuous champagne banquet, stroll by Dracula's castle, and much more. VHS; 60 minutes. Money-back guarantee.



You Can Experience the Legendary "Train of Kings" every day... On a 1,700 mile trip from Paris to Istanbul which runs only twice a year!

**Abigail's Treasures, Dept. 075 AH**  
Box 2957802, Myrtle Beach, SC 29578-7802.

**Yes!** It sounds Great—I'd love to audition the Orient Express Video(s) (Item #W508) on 30-day money back guarantee.

☐ Mr. ☐ Mrs.  
☐ Ms.

Name \_\_\_\_\_

Address \_\_\_\_\_

City \_\_\_\_\_

State \_\_\_\_\_

Zip \_\_\_\_\_

☐ One Video for only \$19.95 plus \$3.95 ship. & hdlg. Total \$23.90

☐ Great Gift Ideas! Two for only \$38.00 plus \$4.95 ship. & hdlg.

Total \$42.95

Charge to my ☐ Visa ☐ MasterCard

Acct. # \_\_\_\_\_

Exp. Date \_\_\_\_\_

Enclosed is \$ \_\_\_\_\_ (NJ residents please add sales tax.)

Please make check/M.O. payable to Abigail's Treasures  
To help process order, you may wish to include your daytime phone number.

Fulfillment G&C Associates

Please allow up to 4-6 weeks for delivery



FICTION

# The Deadly Umbrella

Robert Koshinski



LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG

Illustration by Hank Blustein

ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

**“H**ow long has he been dead?” I asked Fat John, the one and only constable of solitary Rikib Isle.

“Hard to say. He’s swollen from the sun. A couple of hours?”

“Who found him?” I swatted a fly away from my face.

“I did. I came by to see them off like I always do, sealed the area, and called you.” I liked Fat John, and we had become good friends over the years. I knew his father, a somber and slender ex-World War II intelligence officer for the U.S. Army, and his tiny Japanese war-bride. Fat John’s size was just another example of the many surprises that Rikib could spring on you.

“You said he had an entourage,” I said. “What do they say?”

“McKannon wanted to walk the beach before he went back to the States. They all had lunch together, then McKannon’s people went to their rooms to pack and left him to his walk. When they came back to get him, he was dead. He never made it to the beach.”

I looked down at what was James McKannon, reputed Hollywood swinger and one of the many spoiled entertainers who came to this little spot for pampered isolation at the ex-

clusive Grammon Resort estate. He was reclined in a lounge chair; an empty glass sat on a small plastic table next to him. Polished, manicured nails topped long fingers that lay calmly on McKannon’s quiet, sunburned chest. I picked the glass up with my handkerchief, closely examined its surface, then put it to my nose. The faint hint of citrus clung to the bone-dry rim. I returned the glass to the table, and with the knuckle of my other hand, I pushed McKannon’s jaw open and looked into his mouth.

“Anything else?” I asked. Fat John pulled a plastic evidence bag from his pocket; it contained a narrow scrap of partially burnt paper.

“Just this,” he said as he handed the bag to me. “I found it in the kitchen. Someone burned a piece of paper in an ashtray. I pulled this out of the ashes.”

I pinched the bag between my thumb and forefinger and read the words on the fragment inside, “... the deadly umbrella...” The opposite side of the paper was a grey matte, as if it were a black and white picture. I opened the bag and sniffed. The faintest scent of lime mingled with carbon. I looked around and saw the only umbrella in sight. It was very

large, red and white, and stuck in the middle of a table eight feet away from McKannon. Outside of falling on someone, I didn't see how it could be deadly to anybody. I glanced at McKannon again. No bruises or cuts.

"What do you think?" Fat John asked as beads of sweat trailed down the sides of his broad head and dangled from his drooping jowls. I wiped the salty film of perspiration from my own forehead and struck out at another pesky fly.

"I think he's going to stink pretty soon. You'd better pack him in some ice."

"Can't. East hasn't met West yet." Fat John finally caught the dangling sweat on his chin with the crook of his chubby thumb and forefinger. He was referring to the other authorities who would be by, asking questions about McKannon. Halfway between the Marshall Islands and Hawaii, Rikib is owned by the Japanese and falls under their jurisdiction, but they pretty much let Grammon run its own affairs. Fat John confirmed that our old friend Shiraga from the Tokyo police would be accompanying Harris, the U.S. diplomatic aide out of Tokyo.

"You have an hour tops," Fat John said. "They would have been here sooner, but they had

to get authorization to jointly charter a plane. Different governments, same bureaucracy."

You can do a lot in an hour—an old girlfriend taught me that—but solving a murder isn't one of them. As the security guy for Grammon Resorts, I had had plenty of experience cleaning up after these high-flying goofballs, including one other murder in '87. Still, an hour to figure out what had happened here and protect Grammon from bad press . . . I was going to earn my money.

"Anybody from the media know about this yet?" I asked. Fat John shook his head no.

"Good. Where are McKannon's hangers-on?" I asked. Fat John pointed toward the white-washed estate.

"In the living room. Only three. A girlfriend, publicist, and a bodyguard." Fat John looked at me solemnly. "You get this one and I'll buy you the coldest beer on the island."

"You're on," I answered, happy that just a beer was on the line. Fat John and I walked in silence up the white-sand beach to the estate as McKannon continued to roast under the Rikib sun.

As soon as I got a look at McKannon's people, I had their numbers, and all of them were in the L.A. area code. Julie Davis, the girlfriend, was

blonde and aerobically beautiful in a sheer halter top and clingy shorts. McKannon's wife probably wouldn't have appreciated the view as much as I did. Gary Thinnis, the publicist, was one of those brainy techno-types who always wore black and would be equally comfortable on a date with a member of either sex. John Altman was the kind of designer bodyguard favored in the nineties, a little too large, a lot too obvious. McKannon probably liked to sic Altman on pushy fans instead of Dobermans (the dogs are brighter animals and harder to control). I figured I'd try the direct approach.

"I'm Ronnie Wolff," I said, "security for Grammon Resorts." Everyone did what I expected. Altman gave me his tough guy attitude, Thinnis looked down his nose at me, and Davis crossed her long legs so I could get a better look at the positive results of exercise. She probably thought she could distract me. It worked. I pried my eyes from her thighs and looked everyone over.

"So which one of you killed McKannon?" Everyone held his pose.

"Look, it's like this," I continued. "In less than an hour we're going to get a visit from a U.S. diplomatic aide and the Japanese police. After the guy from

the States fills out his paperwork, he's going to leave you to the guy from Tokyo. And the guy from Tokyo doesn't like this kind of thing on his watch. If you work with me, I can save two of you a lot of trouble, and maybe get a little consideration for the guilty one."

Davis squirmed and threw a glance at the other two before she spoke up.

"I think he just had a heart attack," she said.

"You a doctor, Ms. Davis?" I pulled a cane chair to the center of the room and sat down.

"No . . . it's just not good to drink and lie out in that sun. Everybody knows that."

"Yeah, you're right. But the sun doesn't usually turn your tongue black like McKannon's. Some poisons, however, will."

Altman didn't seem to like my theory.

"What the hell are you talking about? Poison? I watched McKannon like a hawk. No way anybody got to him."

"Don't take this the wrong way, big guy," I said to him, "but given McKannon's present health, I'd say you might want to get your eyes checked." Altman stood and threw his chest out as he clenched his hands. I knew I could wrap my chair around his thick head if I had to, but Fat John calmly told him to sit down and he did. I

turned my attention to Thinnis, who was just watching the show.

"How about you, Mr. Thinnis? Got any ideas on how McKannon died?"

Thinnis laid his arm across the back of the couch and flashed me his baby blues.

"You're the expert here. I'm still in shock." Thinnis looked tanned and a little bored, but definitely not shocked.

"He's probably heartbroken," Altman said, sneering at Thinnis.

"Shut up, you pig," Thinnis snapped.

"What are you saying?" I asked Altman.

"My job is to know what's what. Thinnis here was real close with McKannon, if you know what I mean."

"I was his publicist, you moron. Of course I was close to him."

"Don't be ridiculous," Davis added. "I was closer to McKannon than anyone in this room. He wasn't even a little gay."

"That right?" I asked Altman. "Did McKannon and Davis spend a lot of time together here?"

"Yeah, sure. When they weren't eating or drinking, they were in the sack."

Davis smiled smugly at Altman's confirmation.

"How about Thinnis here? What did he do on his summer vacation?"

Altman pointed his thumb at Thinnis. "Him? He spent most of his time reading books when he first got here." I looked at the back wall of the room where built-in shelving ran thirty feet wide and from floor to ceiling. Books filled almost every nook and cranny; Grammon wanted to make sure that guests had everything from Shakespeare to *Playboy* for their reading and viewing pleasure. I returned my attention to Altman.

"Then what? After he got tired of reading?"

Altman shrugged. "He kind of perked up. Went for walks on the back side of the island, got chatty with McKannon, started kissing his butt again." Thinnis checked his neat nails during Altman's report.

"That right, Mr. Thinnis?" I asked. "You liked the deserted beach on the windward side of the island? Right outside is prettier and a lot cleaner."

"I liked the solitude. I didn't have to listen to these two." Thinnis snorted and crossed his legs at the knees. Davis licked her pink-painted lips, and I was reminded how dry I was.

I stood and, excusing myself, went into the kitchen. As I cupped a hand under the faucet

and drank, I noticed a small basket of limes on the counter next to a clean glass pitcher and a large ashtray with the charred remains of the paper Fat John mentioned. An idea started to jell in the back of my head. I returned to the living room and took my seat again.

"So you guys had lunch, and then McKannon decided to go for a walk. He didn't get very far. Why is that, do you suppose?"

Davis raised her eyebrows. "Probably too drunk to walk down there."

"It's less than fifty yards," I said. "Were you guys drinking your lunch?"

"McKannon was. They were." Altman pointed at Davis and Thinnis. "I just had a beer, that's all, one beer."

I looked at Davis and Thinnis. "What were you two drinking?"

"I had lime gimlets with McKannon," Thinnis said.

"I was drinking champagne and orange juice," Davis answered.

"You don't like gimlets?" I asked her.

"Yech. McKannon loved them, but I'm allergic to those things. Besides, I hardly ever have alcohol. It's not good for your skin."

"So McKannon fancied himself a bartender?" I asked.

Davis faked a laugh. "Are you kidding? McKannon fancied himself a star. He never lifted a finger for himself."

"Yeah," Altman added, "besides, Thinnis was always there to do for him." Thinnis pursed his lips and slowly extended the middle finger of his right hand toward Altman.

The stories were starting to add up; I just had to figure out what the burnt paper meant—how an umbrella fit. I looked at Fat John, who stood so quietly I thought he had fallen asleep. Rising from my chair, I walked toward the wall of books at the back of the room. I scanned the rows of titles, looking for the one that must be there, and a moment later had an unabridged dictionary open. I could clearly hear the wheels in Fat John's head clicking behind me. I closed the dictionary and, after slowly reading the spines of the other volumes, pulled a book on Rikib Isle down from a high shelf. I flipped through the pages a couple of times, then closed it and picked up both books.

"Got it," I said, walking past Fat John. "Let's wrap this up."

"Looks like you're out of time, Ronnie," Fat John whispered. He motioned toward the patio door. I saw Harris and Shiraga.

"Yeah, well, at least I know which end's up." I motioned for our guests to enter.

"Hello, Tom. Susu." Shiraga scowled. He hated the nickname I'd assigned our constable.

"As the police representative of Japan, which owns this island, I hereby assume authority over this investigation," Shiraga announced. Shiraga isn't a bad guy, he just likes to be the big man in charge. I nodded and took a step backwards.

"Hey, no problem from me. But the guy you want is Mr. Thinnis there." Thinnis's face turned as white as Kabuki grease when I pointed at him.

"You're crazy!" He jumped up from his chair, acting indignant.

"It's like this," I said. "Everybody knows McKannon was an adventurous guy. He liked his wife, and maybe he liked Thinnis. But he liked Ms. Davis there the best." Davis threw Thinnis a cold stare, and Altman smirked. Thinnis looked like a deer in the headlights as I continued.

"I'm not saying that Davis and Altman didn't want to kill McKannon. I mean, McKannon was probably giving Davis the runaround regarding his wife. And I'd bet that Altman hated being the egg-catcher for McKannon's sorry ass. It's just that Thinnis was a little faster. Too fast."

"Why me?" Thinnis blurted. "Altman is the tough guy."

"I ruled Altman out right away because the kill was too soft for him. Altman would have shot McKannon or broken his neck, maybe drowned him. So it had to be Davis or you."

Harris and Shiraga shifted their attention to Davis, who looked insulted, and Thinnis, who was beginning to pout.

"Why not Davis?" Thinnis said pointing at her. "She's the one who wanted to marry him."

"Another style problem, Thinnis. If Davis was going to poison McKannon, she might have slipped him a few extra drugs and hoped it looked like an overdose or a suicide. Davis would have certainly left some bottles around to push the idea along." Davis looked to her left and right, then down at the floor where probing eyes couldn't find hers.

"But McKannon didn't show any of the normal overdose signs, and the black tongue didn't fit. So how did Thinnis make it happen?" The only noise in the room was a ceiling fan gently thumping above our heads.

Harris cleared his throat. "You going to finish this soon, Professor Wolff?" he asked sarcastically. I turned toward Altman.



"You said that Thinnis spent a lot of time reading when he first got here, then went out for a lot of walks to the deserted beach on the windward side of the island."

"Yeah. That's right. The back side where all the junk floats up."

"And you all agree that the only people drinking lime gimlets at lunch were McKannon and Thinnis. But McKannon didn't make the drinks because he was spoiled and lazy, right? So Thinnis made them."

I pulled the evidence bag with the burnt paper from my pocket. "And this paper, which someone tried to destroy, has a smell like lime—lime juice probably spilled on it and kept it from burning. So I'd say the chances are good that either McKannon or Thinnis handled this paper."

Shiraga shifted stiffly as he spoke. "What is your point, Mr. Wolff?"

"The point is that Thinnis had motive—jealousy. He had opportunity—the lime gimlets. All he needed was the means—the poison. Something accessible and deadly but not too obvious."

Thinnis slowly sat back down in his chair and cradled his face in his hands.

"When Thinnis arrived, he sulked in the library while

McKannon and Davis entertained each other." I handed the Rikib book to Shiraga. "He found this book on the island and its wildlife and ripped out a page that gave him the information he needed. Then he went for walks on the beach where all the junk floats up. When he found what he was looking for, he mixed it up in a batch of gimlets for McKannon and burned the page to destroy the evidence."

I read from the burnt paper: "... the deadly umbrella. . . ." Handing the evidence bag to Shiraga, I opened the dictionary and read one of the alternate definitions of "umbrella": "The gelatinous body of a jellyfish." I passed the books to Shiraga.

"If you get another copy of that Rikib Isle book, you'll find out which one of our slimy friends on the back beach should never be served as sushi. There's probably even a picture of it on the flip side of the page."

"Sounds like a lot of trouble to me," Harris interjected.

"Not really. Thinnis thinks he's a bright guy. He probably hoped that McKannon would make it to the beach, and it would look like he got stung down there and had an allergic reaction. But McKannon never made it to the beach, and jelly-

fish don't walk, so there won't be any other explanation for what Japanese forensics will find in McKannon's blood." Shiraga and Harris would never admit it, but they were impressed. Thinnis just sat quietly like he was already in a Tokyo cell.

"I will conduct a full investigation of this matter," Shiraga said, then gave me a slight bow—about the closest thing to a compliment I would get.

"Sure thing," I said, moving toward the patio door with Fat John in tow. "Besides, Fat John is going to buy me the coldest beer on the island."

---

*(continued from page 4)*

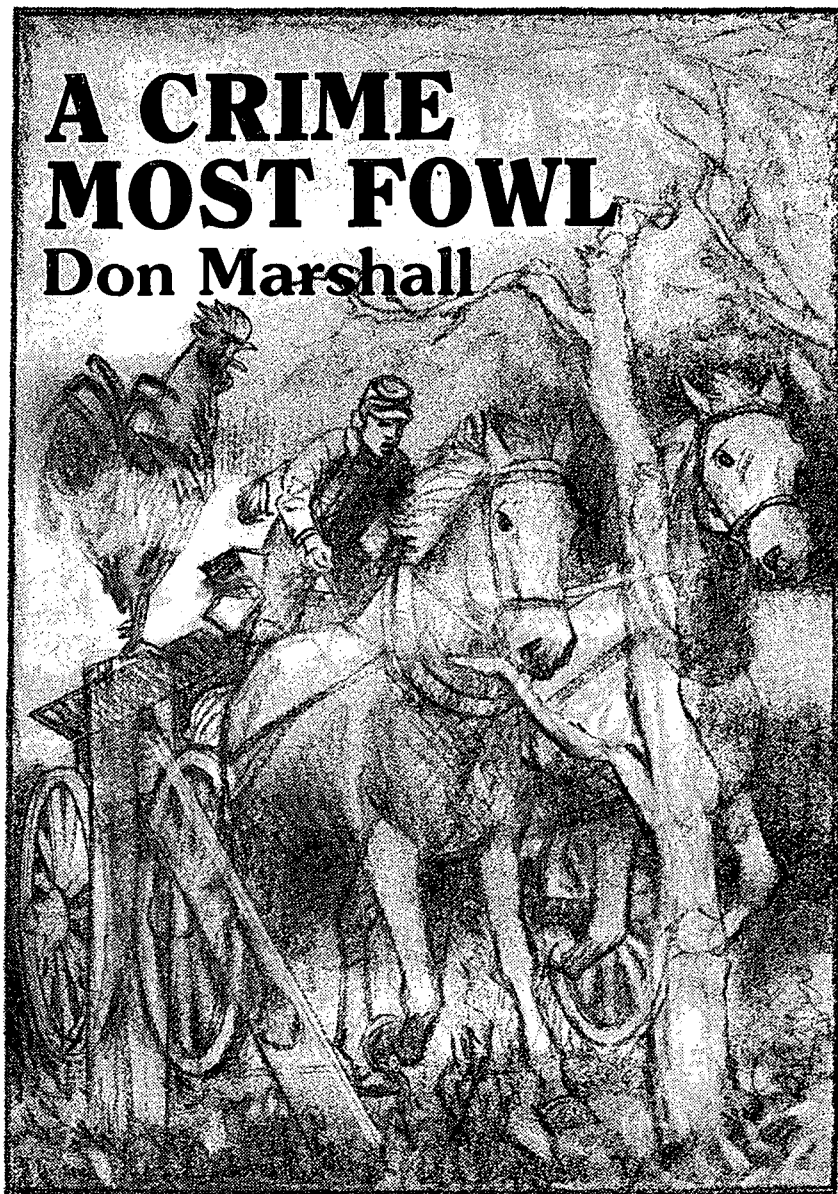
Robert Koshinskie, author of "The Deadly Umbrella," also a first mystery. Mr. Koshinskie is a medical product manager who has worked in the medical industry for the past fifteen years in various capaci-

ties including positions as a research technician, a small business owner, and an international marketing manager. Trained in biophysics, he comes from Shamokin, Pennsylvania, and presently lives in New Jersey.

FICTION

# A CRIME MOST FOWL

Don Marshall



“Gentlemen of the jury, true and loyal citizens of Eu-faula, County of Barbour, in the great State of Alabama, which is located in the southern portion of the continent commonly called North America . . .”

“Your Honor,” the county prosecutor jumped to his feet, “I object to the defense giving us a lesson in geography, even if it is his closing statement. I very well think this diatribe on where we are currently located is beyond the . . .”

“Objection sustained.”

“ . . . As I was saying,” resumed Simon Nickolas, itinerant mortician, dentist, and legal counsel normally of Bear Valley, California, but now representing an old and very dear friend in the state of Alabama, “Your Honor, I will not name the *southern* portion of this splendiferous land out of deference to my learned opponent, who seems ashamed of its identity, even though the honored citizens of that beautiful land are gathered here to render judgment on poor old loyal Uncle Ben Jefferson Davis.

“You have heard the evidence, weak as it is. That poor old loyal Uncle Ben Jefferson Davis was apprehended last April ninth while departing the premises, as the prosecution has alleged, of one Mr. Gordon P. Sykes, an Ohioan . . .”

“I object, Your Honor. There is no need to refer to Mr. Sykes as an Ohioan. Mr. Sykes is a landowner, a farmer here in the state of Alabama, and has been residing here for the last twenty years . . .”

“Mr. Prosecutor, before I rule on your objection, I must know, is Mr. Sykes from Ohio?”

“Yes, Your Honor, he is. He moved here some twenty years ago.”

“From what part of Ohio?”

“I believe from Astubula, Your Honor.”

“Astubula . . . that’s pretty far north in Ohio, isn’t it?”

“Yes, Your Honor. I believe it’s about as far north as you can go in Ohio.”

“Ah yes, I see. Objection sustained. I will caution the defense to make no further reference to the fact that Mr. Sykes is a Northerner . . . and a newcomer . . . unless it is germane to the case at hand.”

“Sorry, Your Honor. I was merely stating that Mr. Sykes moved here from the northern portion of the state of Ohio to take over a Southern plantation on which he raises pigs . . . Chester Whites, to be exact. Chester Whites originated in Chester County, Pennsylvania, hence their name . . .”

"Your Honor, I must object again. It seems the defense is bound and determined to distract the jury with geography lessons when the issue here is to find the defendant guilty of stealing six chickens from the henhouse of Mr. Sykes."

"Ah-hem. Ah yes, I must admonish the defense for referring to the Northern origin of those animals, as they do not appear to be involved in either the prosecution or the defense. I will sustain. Continue."

"Sorry, Your Honor. It won't happen again. As I was saying, gentlemen of the jury, the accusation, as you have heard, by the prosecution against old Uncle Ben here is that on April ninth of this year, just *exactly thirty years* after the Confederacy elected to call an honorable halt to the differences of opinion that had arisen . . ."

"Your Honor, I must again object to the defense. This last statement is now a history lesson, and I am certain that it is of no concern to the jury what happened thirty years prior to the theft of Mr. Sykes's chickens."

"Ah-hem. Ah yes. I don't think that what occurred at Appomattox thirty years ago, uh, that is what you were referring to, is it not, Mr. Nickolas? If so, I do not see that it has a bearing on the case. I will sustain."

"Yes, Your Honor, I will refrain from making a history lesson out of the fact that old, devoted Uncle Ben Jefferson Davis here tromped over that hallowed ground more than thirty years ago when he assisted with the loading of household goods belonging to poor old Widow Beauregard, whose husband was killed while gallantly fighting shoulder to shoulder alongside that great Confederate general, George Pickett, whose outnumbered troops were savagely attacked *from the rear* at Five Forks, Virginia, by overwhelmingly superior Northern troops.

"When I say superior, I mean numerically only, and there was she, the Widow Beauregard, helpless in the face of fourteen thousand ravaging Northern troops under General James Wilson . . ."

"Your Honor, again I must object to the history lesson the defense insists on bringing into this trial. Wilson didn't get to within two hundred miles of Eufaula."

"Mr. Nickolas, is there a specific reason for your bringing up this savage cavalry raid into the state of Alabama?"

"Your Honor, I was only pointing out that Old Uncle Ben here, whose bowed but noble shoulders carried the weight of loyalty,

now hopes that this honored courthouse . . . this house of Southern comfort, this bastion of Southern justice . . . will honor, not persecute, the very man who so gallantly helped the poor, bereaved Widow Beauregard in her harrowing escape from the hated invaders . . . ”

“Your Honor, there was no harrowing escape! General Wilson did not, I repeat *did not*, get to within two hundred miles of here.”

“I know that, Mr. Prosecutor, but I don’t think that Widow Beauregard or Mr. Ben Jefferson Davis knew that at the time. However, I do think your objection has some merit. I will sustain. Mr. Nickolas, you will abstain from any more references to the Yankee troops that invaded the fair state of Alabama. Continue.”

“Yes, Your Honor. I must apologize to you and to the members of the jury for my referring to the brave actions of old Uncle Ben here who, as a loyal servant thirty years ago, chose not to flee, but to stay and help his beloved mistress in her time of sorrow and her hour of need.

“And his reward, gentlemen? What has been his reward, I ask? He stands accused of stealing chickens . . . Rhode Island Reds, *Northern* chickens . . . ”

“Objection! Objection! The origin of the chickens is of no matter, Your Honor. I’m sure the chickens were hatched on Mr. Sykes’s farm.”

“Counsel, is there a reason you identify the chickens in question as Rhode Island Reds?”

“Your Honor, I was merely using the term Rhode Island Reds as a matter of identification of the alleged stolen property. In no way was I referring or alluding to the Rhode Island troops that were so soundly whipped by the gallant 2nd Alabama infantry on Matthews Hill at the Battle of Bull Run.”

“All right, as long as you were not trying to unduly influence the jury by alluding to chickens as being invaders of our fair state of Alabama.”

“Far be it, Your Honor, quite the contrary. The chickens in question are certainly not invaders and, of course, have no say whether or not their owner is of Northern extraction, even though they themselves were born and bred right here in the glorious South.

“Mr. Sykes claims in his testimony that on the night in question . . . ”

“Objection, Your Honor, to the use of ‘claim.’ Mr. Sykes did not *claim* on the night in question. He stated flatly and unequivocally



that he heard a noise . . . a lot of noise, and that he caught the defendant, Mr. Ben Jefferson Davis, in his henhouse with six of his prize hens stuffed in a cotton sack.

"That is not a *claim*, but a statement of fact."

"I will withdraw my use of the word 'claim' in my summation."

"Very well, Mr. Nickolas, continue."

"Now, Mr. Sykes says he heard a noise and stepped outside to investigate. Gentlemen of the jury, imagine *yourselves* peering about in the dark on this old and venerated estate, the very property that once belonged to a Southern gentleman, a hero who was so viciously slain in defense of his country at Five Forks by Northern invaders.

"As you stand in the dark, the gray fog drifts silently in from the river, the mist lies cold and low in the hollow, damp moss hangs from the branches overhead, the fog moves slowly, shredding around each bush, then mending itself as it silently billows onward. You hear the dripping of dew on the roof, the rustle of palmettos under the pale, misty moon.

"At the stroke of twelve you hear, just as Mr. Sykes states he heard, a deep rumble . . ."

"Objection, Your Honor. Mr. Sykes did not say a deep rumble, he said he heard the *very loud clatter* of feeding tins being knocked over. The defense is again trying to mislead the jury."

"Objection overruled. Continue."

" . . . the deep rumble of heavy iron-bound wheels. The sound grows louder, it is the sound of rumbling cannon on uneven ground. You smell the pungent odor of sweating horses and wet leather. The horses heave, panting. You hear rough human voices, the crack of whips, the squeak of saddle leather, the rattle of trace chains.

"You watch team after team plod ever onward. Gray steam rises from their sweating flanks, and behind them, you hear the rr-r-r-r-rup, rr-r-r-r-rup of tramping, marching feet and then the clatter of horsemen.

"The moon dodges behind a cloud, a straggle of men emerge through the gray mist. Men in tattered, bloody uniforms, rusted muskets clinging to tired shoulders, hollow-eyed soldiers marching ever forward. Slowly they slog by, yet their battle-torn Bonnie Blue banners are held high. They are passing, passing . . . those valiant dead, plodding onward to reinforce Lee in Virginia. You watch until the last of them is embraced by the dark beyond.



"Suddenly, a racing wagon, the sharp crack of a whip! Horses in full gallop! 'Hyah! Hyah!' the driver urges the team, he has to catch the army. 'Hyah!', racing, racing to catch those marching men, racing to stop those valorous spirits who have already demonstrated their chivalry, shed their blood in sacrifice for a cause so near and dear to their hearts. The driver shouts, 'Too late!, it is too . . . late!'

"A cock crows . . ."

"Objection, Your Honor. Mr. Sykes did not say 'cockcrow.' He said, very clearly, that he heard a chicken squawk. A chicken squawk is not a *cockcrow*!"

"Shut up, you! Continue, counsel."

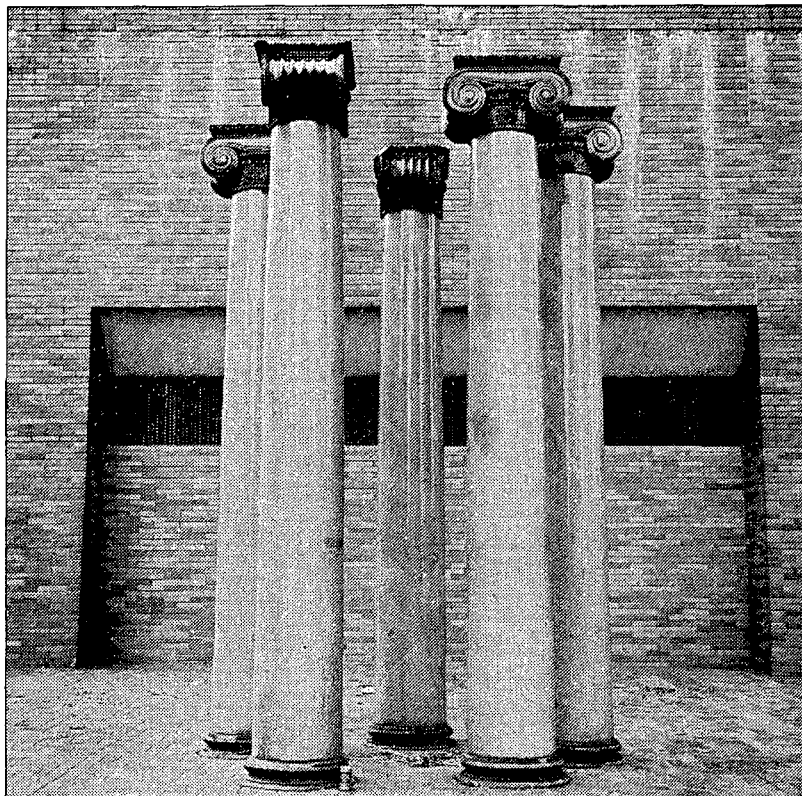
"At the sound of the cockcrow, the racing messenger fades from view, his important dispatch to remain forever undelivered. The spectral army will never know their march is futile, for, on this date, April ninth, thirty years prior, the war . . . well, the war came to an end. Their honored duty is over, and General Lee wants them to take their well-deserved rest.

"Now it is too late, too late, gentlemen. The Army of the Dead will continue to march every April ninth for all eternity, never resting, never finding peace . . . not through the fault of poor, loyal Ben Davis but because *Sykes* startled that damned cock into crowing too early. The defense rests."

"Is the jury ready to deliberate?"

"Your Honor, we don't have to deliberate, we think that damned chicken-disturbin' Ohio Blue Belly oughter be hung!"

# THE MYSTERIOUS PHOTOGRAPH



Henri Silberman, N.Y.C.

All right, frieze! We will give a prize of \$25 to the person who invents the best mystery story (in 250 words or less, and be sure to include a crime), based on the above photograph. The story will be printed in a future issue. Reply to Alfred Hitchcock Mystery Magazine, 1540 Broadway, New York, New York 10036. Please label your entry "July Contest," and be sure your name and address are written on the story you submit.

The winning entry for the February Mysterious Photograph contest will be found on page 157.

FICTION

# Caterpillar Bones

D. A. McGuire

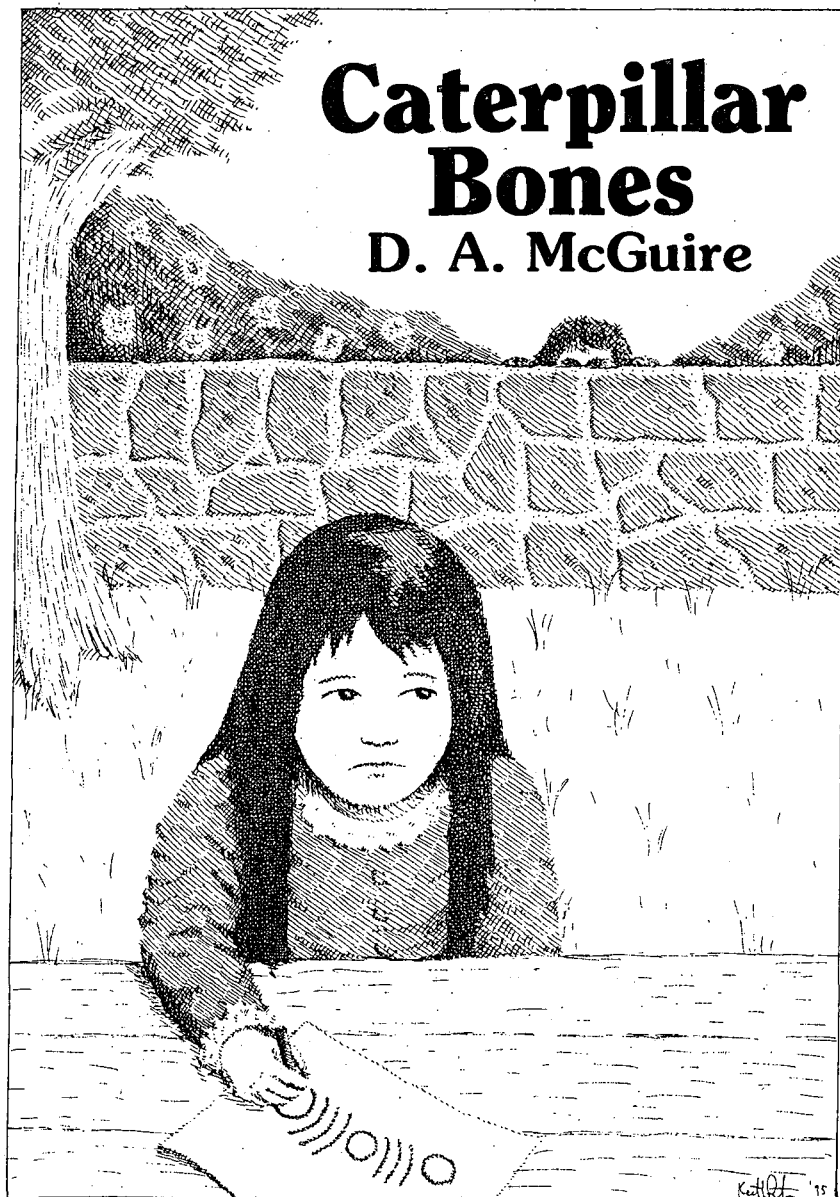


Illustration by Keith Peters

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG  
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

When I first met Amy Suares, I thought she was autistic, one of those kids who don't talk and kind of look right through you without seeing anything. They don't recognize you as being human, to them you might as well be a tree or a rock, but it's not their fault. It's got something to do with the brain, or so I've heard. I saw a tape about it at school once, and it's kind of hard to explain. Even the doctors who specialize in studying autism don't all agree about what's really going on in these people's heads.

But the hardest ones to explain are those they call idiot savants. They're the ones who can draw or play music or do math just like the experts—sometimes *better* than the experts—but when you talk to them, they're real slow, mentally retarded actually. I find them fascinating, but then, anything I don't understand I find fascinating.

Amy Suares fascinated me. I didn't know where to put her, into which category she belonged, and I suppose that was kind of unfair of me. Why should I have wanted to put her into *any* category? She was just a little girl, six years old, with huge dark eyes, so brown they were almost black, light olive skin, and a face you could look

at and imagine ten years from now. Amy Suares was going to be beautiful.

But she didn't talk. Or rarely, she talked. Well, she talked to me. That is to say, she would talk to me if she felt like it, which wasn't often, but she would. Mrs. Fisher warned me the day I met Amy, in Mrs. Fisher's back yard, that Amy rarely spoke. You see, Amy Suares was a foster child, and Mrs. Fisher was looking after her for a few weeks, maybe through the summer. Mrs. Fisher had been my first grade teacher, so I knew her pretty well. I'd always liked her because she was so gentle and patient, and when this community service project came up—a requirement for my social studies class—and my mother saw the list of projects available, this was the only one she would approve of. I've got more to say about that, which I'll get to in a bit.

Anyhow, Mrs. Fisher warned me that Amy "wasn't much of a talker," and if I could get "two words out of her, that'd be something," and not to take it personally, but "Amy has a very difficult time relating to people."

"Maybe she doesn't like people," I offered. We were standing in Mrs. Fisher's yard, the kind of yard grownups would

call spacious. There were only a few trees in it, a couple of big oaks out by the gravel driveway where I'd dropped my bike and a big red maple that shaded a wooden picnic table in the back. A pile of plastic toys and an empty wading pool were nearby, but Amy just ignored them, and after meeting me (which had been done quickly, just a flash of those brown-black eyes) she'd run off across the yard to the picnic table.

"Maybe she just doesn't like adults, Herbert," Mrs. Fisher said to me. She was a tall and elegant woman, dressed in a white blouse, blue skirt, and sneakers; her long gray hair was pulled back in a ponytail clip against the back of her neck.

"So . . ." It seemed a lead-in to a question; I wasn't about to let it slip past. "Did some adult . . . hurt her?" I looked up at Mrs. Fisher. Mrs. Helen Fisher she was, retired from teaching for two years, widowed for five. When I'd been in her class, I'd wondered if I'd ever be able to look her straight in the eye; now, at thirteen years old, it seemed I probably never would. She must have been six foot easy. I just made five two.

Mrs. Fisher didn't answer right away. She was looking across the yard to where Amy

sat, huddled over something on the picnic table. It looked like she was coloring or drawing.

If you had asked me to name my favorite teacher of all time, it would have been very close, either Mr. Locks, my current social studies teacher, or Mrs. Fisher. But I think Mrs. Fisher would have eventually won. I had always liked her. The year after I had her, her husband died, and I remember all the teachers talking about what a "brave woman" she was. She missed only two days of school that year, returning the day after her husband's funeral, teaching first graders, doing recess duty on the playground. When my Dad died, my mother took a whole year off—in fact, she'd been so depressed we had to move in with my Aunt Clem in Southerdale, Massachusetts. Later Mom and I moved back to Cape Cod, here to Manamesset where Mom had a few friends. Still, my mother and her life are a whole other story; it's just that I've noticed that different people—kids and grownups alike—all react to death and tragedy in all sorts of different ways.

And Amy Soares was reacting to her tragedy in a different way, too. She didn't talk—or rather she rarely talked—and she drew. As I watched her, I slowly realized she



wasn't coloring in a book, she was drawing on a pad of white paper with crayons, some of which were rolling around on the table. A few had fallen onto the ground.

"Well, Herbert, we really don't know Amy's whole story," Mrs. Fisher finally said with a sigh. "We think she's been more neglected than abused. I really can't say an awful lot about it, you understand."

"Sure." But really I didn't understand at all. How was I supposed to work with the little kid if I didn't know anything about her? I had a math tutor at the local college who worked with me, and he knew plenty about *me*; they made sure he did.

"She doesn't respond well to children her own age, either. In fact, she just ignores them. As far as adults go, well, she'll let me feed her, brush her hair, get her dressed, bathe her, but other than that, there's nothing. She will let me hug her, but there's no response, she's absolutely wooden. When she first came to the house—" a slight smiled crossed Mrs. Fisher's lips "—all she had was a little suitcase, a few clothes, a doll a social worker had given her, and a box of broken crayons. Well, after she went in and out of every room in my house, she went into the kitchen, sat herself down at the table, and

started to draw. On napkins. On some plain, white napkins I had on the table. I had some old mimeograph paper left from my teaching days, so I gave it to her, and she started to draw again . . . everything she'd just seen. Each room. Each picture on the wall. My curio closet and dining room hutch with all its dishes. The rugs on the floor. Even my old cat Sam, sunning himself on a windowsill. It was really amazing because she's actually very good, for a child, that is. After that, I had the feeling that Amy was trying to keep things, to put them down on paper before they could be taken away from her, and that it was her way of holding onto things, things she always, inevitably, loses." She stopped suddenly, hand on her throat as though catching herself before saying something she shouldn't. "Oh my, that sounds terribly profound, doesn't it? I didn't mean it to sound that way."

"That's okay," I told her, my eyes wandering back to Amy, sitting like a lost little soul at the picnic table beneath the maple tree. That's a saying my mother often uses when she finds me alone just daydreaming. I had a teacher who called it my "pensive look," but my mother termed it better, lost little soul, and I think Mrs. Fisher had it right, too, when

she said Amy had been trying to "keep things."

I thought I'd be doing the same thing in her place.

"What we'd really like, Herbert," Mrs. Fisher said, turning to the practical, "is for you to simply befriend Amy, if that makes any sense. I don't want you to think you're no more than a glorified babysitter because this isn't your average babysitting job. I haven't told you everything yet."

I wanted to say that for someone who wasn't supposed to tell me too much, she sure was telling me a lot, but I kept my mouth shut.

"Amy has a tendency to wander, which isn't good in this neighborhood." She turned around, pointing up the street behind us. "The bay's at the end of the street, and most of the houses here are summer homes, which I think you can tell."

I nodded. Here on Broadhurst road most of the houses were fairly small, squashed together with tiny front yards, nonexistent back yards. Only in Mrs. Fisher's section—an area of double lots and year-round residents—were the yards larger. There were cars in the driveways here, and the lawns were neatly clipped. The houses farther up were still closed—blinds down, grass in

need of mowing. This was the middle of May, and most of the summer people hadn't started to arrive yet.

"Mrs. Rodgers is next door; Mrs. Peters is on my other side. Both are widows. Mrs. Rodgers is a bit of a curmudgeon and doesn't take kindly to finding Amy sitting on her stone wall. You may have heard of her? Natalie Rodgers? The retired stage and film star?"

I shook my head, shrugged. Was I supposed to have heard of her?

"She was a big star in the forties and fifties, started out as a circus performer, then she married Maurice Rodgers, the Hollywood producer. They were quite well known for a while, then they came out here and Maurice... well, he deserted poor Natalie, ran off with their Japanese maid. I don't think he worked in this country again, though Natalie told me once that he was making independent art films in Europe. But that hardly matters." She waved her hand in the direction of the woman's house, a dark brown clapboard shingled house, larger than the rest of the houses on the street and set well back, surrounded by badly kept shrubbery and a lot of small maples and oaks that had grown up wild and should have been cut back long ago.



Her yard was separated from Mrs. Fisher's by a broken-down stone wall that ran the length of both properties and vanished into a thickly wooded section that lay behind the house.

"She speaks to me occasionally, usually to complain about my foster children. I saw her the other day at the mailbox, and I told her I had only the one child right now, Amy, and she told me that was still one child too many." A sad smile passed across Mrs. Fisher's face as she turned in the other direction, pointing out a more cheerful blue and white Cape with windowboxes full of purple and pink petunias. "Mrs. Peters, on the other side, is very nice. She'll call me right away if any of my little charges wander her way, because you see, Amy . . . Amy just takes off. She's not running away, mind you, because she always comes back. Still, she's only six, and in this neighborhood with the empty houses and the water so near, I have to keep my eye on her constantly." She was looking at me and frowning as though it were important to make a point of this. "She went out the bedroom window once when I was using the bathroom." She lifted her eyebrows; I was starting to get the point.

"But as to why I'm glad you're here? Not to keep her

reined in for me, not by any means. If I thought I couldn't handle her, I'd send her right back to New Bedford. No, what Amy needs right now is stability, a feeling that she belongs somewhere and that someone cares about her. She also needs to interact with someone other than an adult. We tried school, even though there's barely four weeks left, but she just . . . refused. She wouldn't do anything she was asked. She even went back to wetting her pants. Now there *are* ways of handling that, but since she's been through so much, we figured it wouldn't hurt to wait and try again in September."

I nodded, feeling as though I was being required to take all this in like a great sponge.

"So while you're here, just try talking to her, and do this . . . I found this works sometimes with very quiet children. Sit with her and just . . . do whatever she's doing. Draw. And concentrate very hard on what you're drawing, just as though it's the most important thing you've ever done. Look at her once in a while, and comment on her work, show her that you two share a common interest. I remember you, Herbert Sawyer, you were always an excellent little artist."

"Thanks." I shrugged, though I wished she could have left out the "little."

"Let her lead the conversation, if there is one. Oh my, I sound like I'm giving you far too much direction. We just feel that a boy your age, well, that Amy might respond better to you than to her counselor and social worker, and . . ." Another sigh, this one longer and drawn out. "Were you told why, Herbert?"

I shook my head. My social studies teacher had arranged for this visit through my guidance counselor, and from him, Mr. Jarback, I'd learned very little.

"Amy had a fifteen-year-old brother she adored. He was killed in a driveby shooting. It was shortly afterwards that her mother abandoned her. Amy may eventually be eligible for adoption, but until then . . ."

I looked across the back yard again, felt a rush of cold salt air lift the back of my hair. I needed a haircut. I needed a cold drink. And if Amy and I were going to sit out there and draw, we were both going to need jackets. Funny, I was already starting to feel like a big brother.

But I also needed one thing: I needed a way to keep *this part* of my service project from my mother, because if she found out about Amy Soares' brother, it would literally be the dog-pound for me.

Two weeks before, when the list came out, my mother had sat at the kitchen table and drawn a pencil line through everything she didn't want me doing. My mother is very open and understanding, and generally speaking I manage to get my own way—most of the time. So I was very surprised to see her make a dark pencil slash through Inmate Detention Center, Barnstable County. And then, through Hollyhocks Nursing Home, Northport, and the Northport Park Community Hospice. And even through Save the Bay Foundation, Manamesset Harbor. She had an explanation for every one.

"No prisons. No juvenile detention centers." She gave me a determined, fixed stare. "I've had enough of your getting involved with criminals, Herbert Sawyer, Jr."

"Wasn't my fault." I settled in across the table from her, folded my arms on it. I was a little disappointed but tried to hide it. My best friend, Chuckie Moses, was going to do this project at the detention center tutoring kids our age who didn't know how to read.

"No nursing home either."

I just gave her a pained, puzzled look.

"There was an incident of suspected poisoning there a few years ago, a nurse and a resident were accused—"

I interrupted her, something I rarely did. "Mom! That whole case was dropped! The old man who accused them was having some kind of delusions because he watched too much TV, and he was taking his roommate's medication. The whole thing was dropped."

"Don't interrupt again," she said sharply. "As you well know, if there was even one iota of truth in that story, you'd dig it all up. I will not have you working in that place."

"I think *you* watch too much TV," I muttered as I crossed my arms and slid down in the chair.

"Are you being fresh with me, young man?" she demanded, then turned her attention back to the list. "As for Save the Bay, I've heard some young men from the boot camp at the correctional institute will be working alongside the volunteers. Need I say more?"

I sat even farther back, front chair legs off the floor, and tried not to roll my eyes. It was damn hard to do, as my friend Jake Valari, local cop, would have said.

"So that leaves the Recycling Center, the Animal Rescue

Center, and this Foster Child Program."

"And the hospice?" I interjected hopefully.

"Dead and dying people?" she said back to me. "I think not. Not this time."

"The Recycling Center?" I was getting desperate.

"Someone at work told me they have men working there who are out on parole. So the answer to that—" another dark pencil slash "—is no."

"Mom, the Foster Child Program is just a stupid babysitting job, and even though I like animals, I heard all they let you do at Animal Rescue is clean out the kennels, and I swear to God if I have to shovel—"

"Swear to nothing, Herbert Sawyer, Jr." She reached out and rapped my elbow with the pencil. "I will not have you put in any situation where you can get into trouble again. Do you hear me?"

"Yes, ma'am," I said, just a bit too sarcastically.

That's when I knew she really meant business. Her eyes came up to meet mine, a fierce light shining through them. My mother is a tiny woman, dark-eyed, dark-haired, and like I said, I usually got my own way with her, but not this time. When I looked at her, I was seeing the same intensity on her face that I saw on Amy

Suares' just a few days later. My mother had been through a lot the last several years, struggling to keep our heads above water. She'd worked long hard hours to keep us in food and clothes and to pay all the bills. It wasn't until recently, with her new job, that we suddenly had a little extra cash, a fairly new car, and this house—a real house and not just some summer cottage we had to rent cheap all winter, then vacate as soon as the tourists started coming back.

Mom had worked as a chambermaid and waitress back then; now she had a job in the local school superintendent's office, not as a secretary but as a clerical aide. Still, the money and benefits were better than ever before. She was actually putting aside a few dollars each month toward my college fund, and she was dating, too, the aforementioned Jake Valari, who incidentally had helped Mom get her new job, though she wasn't ever to know that.

"Okay," I said softly. She was still glaring at me. "I'll take the dogpound."

"You'll take the Foster Child Program." Where just a few months ago something like this would never have happened, it was happening now. The new job, the nicer house, and even, or most especially, dating Jake

Valari, were turning her into a different person. "It'll be safer, though I have no doubt if there's trouble to be found anywhere you will certainly find it."

"But, Mom, those other times," I said, sounding kind of whiny, which I hated. "I just kind of . . . fell into things."

We both knew what I was referring to. Several times in the last year I'd been in the wrong place at the wrong time and gotten mixed up in some pretty scary—or what my English teacher would have called "hoary"—situations.

She ignored my remark, was tapping the pencil on the line where she had to sign her approval. "It's perfect," she said. "Working with a little boy or girl, someone you can be a big brother to. And it should be safe." Then suddenly, almost inexplicably, she smiled.

But then I understood that, too. I wasn't anyone's big brother, but just the idea I might be, for a little while, really pleased her.

So, hiding my reluctance, I nodded. She'd won this one. "Okay, Mom, whatever you say."

**I** thought she might be autistic, you know, because Mrs. Fisher told me she didn't

talk but that she drew. She said Amy was very good for a child, but that's an understatement, Mr. Hornton." I was setting the table for him and me. Mr. Hornton was an old family friend, about seventy years old or so, who lived only a few streets over from Mom and me. We'd known him for years; he was a friend of Jake's, too. Right now I was getting ready to share some fried chicken, clam chowder, and corn muffins with him. Mom and Jake had made plans for a nice, intimate dinner, without me.

"What I mean is that Amy Soares can really draw, and better than most adults, or even artists. Look, she let me borrow a few of her pictures." I pulled them out of my schoolbag and spread them across the table, over the plates and silverware. There were eight in all.

In composition, Amy's pictures were probably fairly crude, as well as in the materials she used. Amy used the fat, blunt, colorful crayons that most kids her age used. I had offered her my felt-tip pens, but she wanted nothing to do with them. Then, with an intensity and industry I'd seldom seen in anyone, child or adult, she had worked patiently on picture after picture, tossing them into

an untidy heap when they were done.

"You borrowed them?" Mr. Hornton appeared only mildly interested. He walked over to the table, oversized fork in one hand. He'd been turning chicken pieces in the hot oil of his electric fry-pan. "So you got her to talk to you, did you?"

"Well, yes, a little. No, not really. I sat at the table with her and started to draw... this one is mine." I pointed to a half-completed seascape, blue bay, white sails, black gulls in silhouette. "And once in a while she'd look over, stare at what I was doing, then go back to her own picture. But look at these, just look at them."

Mr. Hornton was an artist, too, but of quite a different kind. He was a signpainter, retired, but he knew perspective, color, shading, and all the basics of drawing and painting. He was also a fairly decent sketch artist; I'd seen a few portraits he'd done in black charcoal of his family and friends. He could see that Amy Soares' crayon pictures were unique and unusual.

"This one." I pointed to an orange sofa with an orange cat, or rather what Amy called the "Cat-Couch." That's what was so remarkable about Amy's drawings, something no one had bothered to tell me. Amy

Suares drew two—or occasionally three—objects combined into one. Whether she drew from economy, creativity, or just a skewed perspective on the world in general was not for me to judge, but I did know that her drawings were not the rough, childish sketches a six-year-old would be expected to make. They were something else altogether, something that pointed to an extraordinary talent. And I don't think anyone had realized that yet either, not Mrs. Fisher and probably not the social workers and counselors working with Amy. But then they had other concerns; Amy's artwork was probably the least of them. They wanted Amy to talk, to feel secure, to be able to attend school and fit in—or conform—to public school standards. Her artistic abilities could wait.

"So, is it a couch, Mr. Hornton? Or is it a cat? See, Mrs. Fisher has a couch in her living room with pillows built into either end. They kind of turn over and under like scrolls, and Amy's turned them into the cat's paws in front and its tail in back." I pointed to where the orange cat blended into the orange sofa.

"And that's not all. Take a look at these."

They were all the same. A dining room hutch was com-

bined with a family portrait of Mrs. Fisher's relatives: each plate had a separate face and identity.

A rug on a bedroom floor had turned into a giant postage stamp, a copy of a needlepoint picture on the bedroom wall.

A four-poster bed in Mrs. Fisher's guest room was still unmistakably a bed, but the posts had been turned into the front and back ends of two carousel horses—taken from a music box on a bedstand in the same room.

Then there was a bird feeder from Mrs. Peters' next door, transformed with an elegant brass railing and a lampshade on top. These elements had been taken from Mrs. Peters' driveway lanterns. There were three others I hadn't been able to identify: a sleeping dragon lying on its belly; a turtle with his head stretched up, his mouth wide open; and, last, a series of round circles, or maybe they were rocks. Between each was a series of curved white lines, looking like spears or the pickets of a fence. Amy had taken great care with these lines, outlining them in black and then filling them in with white crayon.

"She names most of them," I told Mr. Hornton. "Like I said, this is 'Cat-Couch.' The others are 'Face-Plates,' 'Licking-Rug,'

# TRY YOUR HAND AT GREAT MYSTERY READING

**Subscribe to Ellery Queen's  
Mystery Magazine and enjoy  
issue after issue of spine-  
tingling suspense stories,  
humorous detectiverses, and  
insightful reviews of current  
mystery novels.**

**TOLL FREE**

**1-800-333-3053**

**BY MAIL**

**Ellery Queen  
P.O. Box 5127  
Harlan, IA 51593**

MUEQ6

In U.S. receive 18 issues for only \$29.97 or 12 issues for \$20.97. Outside U.S. & Poss., 18 issues for \$39.97, 12 issues for \$27.97. All foreign orders must be paid in U.S. currency. Canadian orders include GST. Please allow four to six weeks for delivery of your first issue. We publish two double issues, in March and October. These count as two each towards your subscription.



LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG  
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED



'Bird-Lighthouse.' The ones I'm not sure of have names, too. This is 'Sleeping-Dragon-Rock,' and 'Yawning-Turtle-Stone,' and the last one is called 'Caterpillar-Bones.' I don't know where she got the ideas for these three, but they're interesting all the same, aren't they?"

"Looks like one talented little girl there," was his only comment as he went back to turn the chicken and stir the chowder.

"Yeah, she is, and it wasn't bad working with her. Which is how I call it—working with her. Every now and then she'd talk to me, tap on my picture and tell me I needed more blue. This one is 'Merry-Go-Sleeping.'" I showed him the one with the carousel horses and the bed. "She had a lot of others, too. Let's see, there's one with a television screen on a dishwasher, and another where she combined the blades of a ceiling fan with a telephone receiver. It's the wildest thing."

"Reminds me a little of Dali."

"Yeah, I guess." I hadn't seen much of Dali's work, so I could only half agree. "But this is all her own. When I asked her if I could show some of these to you, she said yes, and that was great, too, because it was the first question she answered for me. Then I asked if she did this

at school, and she just shook her head. That's how she usually responds, she shakes her head or just stares at you. I'm telling you, it was a really weird experience. I think she's some kind of child genius, or prodigy or something, and I intend to tell my counselor about it. She should maybe have lessons, don't you think? I mean from a professional, to help her improve and—"

He spun around, greasy fork in hand, and shook his head. "That's exactly what she doesn't need, Herbie. She's already got talent, and she may need guidance and support to develop her talent, but not instruction. This little girl is a natural, which even I can see."

"You're probably right." I was strangely passive that evening, especially about something I felt so strongly about. "Anyhow, it was fun and I'm going back next week. I only have to do twelve hours with her, but maybe I'll do more." I shrugged. "Who knows?"

I neatly assembled the pictures in a pile and put them carefully into my schoolbag. "I think I'll show them to Miss Christio, too, my art teacher at school."

Mr. Hornton was starting to transfer huge pieces of chicken onto a paper towel. They smelled great; so did the muf-

fins finishing up in the oven. With a nod of his head he gestured me over to the cutting board where I started in on a pair of huge, overripe tomatoes. Tomatoes weren't in season yet, so I wondered where he'd found these.

"There's more to all this, isn't there? Spit it out. There's something else you want to tell me."

"Hey, am I that obvious?" I said as I turned the tomatoes around and around, figuring where to start cutting. "Okay, so Mom wanted me to take an assignment where I couldn't get into any trouble, something that wouldn't be dangerous. She nixed the detention center, the hospice, the nursing home."

"I know all that."

"She said okay to this, the Foster Child Program. But what if she knew that Amy Soares' brother was killed in a driveby shooting? I don't know where Amy's from, but I think Mrs. Fisher said New Bedford. Still, I've been thinking, and this might be real far-fetched, but what if Amy Soares doesn't talk because she's scared or something? What if maybe she saw something, or heard something, and . . ."

Mr. Hornton was just staring at me, drumstick speared on the end of his fork.

"Do you think I'm crazy, Mr. Hornton?"

"I'll tell you what I think." He slid the last piece of chicken onto the paper towel with his fingers. "I think your mother has every right to be concerned about you and what you get involved in."

"Oh, come on, Mr. Hornton," I said, sounding whiny again. "Do you think I look for trouble?"

"I think trouble looks for *you*, boy." He was opening the oven; the smell of fresh corn muffins spilled out into the room. "Just like flies look for fresh road-kill."

"Oh, come on—"

"But as for telling your mother about this little girl's brother, I think that's something you've got to decide for yourself." He gave me a thoughtful, almost pained look as he slid an oven mitt onto his hand. "I just want you to promise *me* one thing."

"What's that?"

"That if you see, or sense, anything wrong at that house, you tell someone, either me or Mrs. Fisher or Jake, because I trust your instincts, Herbie. Will you do that?"

"Sure. Okay." I could live with that; besides, I was probably just overreacting. The events of the past year had set everyone a little on edge. "I promise."

"Good." He had taken the muffins out, slammed the oven door. "Now let's eat."

**T**he next week I worked with Amy on Monday, Wednesday, and Friday, putting in two hours each day. The Monday after that was Memorial Day, and Mom and I did our usual Memorial Day routine: flowers on Dad's grave, flowers on my grandparents' graves. Then we went to watch the Memorial Day parade. It goes right through Manamesset and then on to Northport and Northport Park. Mom left with Jake afterwards, but I hung around for some cotton candy, to see if I could find my friend Chuckie Moses.

That's when a funny thing happened as I was crossing the town common. There, not more than twenty feet from the war memorial plaque that had just been commemorated, I happened to see something that looked vaguely and eerily familiar—a rock that resembled the subject of one of Amy Soares' drawings, "Yawning-Turtle-Stone." There it was, a large boulder with a crack running down one side giving it the effect—if you came up on it right—of a turtle's head with its mouth open. But I knew there had to be more, and when

I looked up and down the street I found it: the Sleepy Turtle Antique Shop and Used Book Store, directly across the street from the common.

"Son of a gun," I muttered as I went off to look for Chuckie.

That week I went to work with Amy on Tuesday and Thursday, but every day the routine was the same. First Amy and I would draw; well, to be honest, that's all we'd really do. Tuesday it was raining, so we worked on Mrs. Fisher's back porch. Amy drew "Elephant-Flowers," a combination of some carnations Mrs. Fisher had in a vase and an elephant figurine she kept on the kitchen windowsill. She transformed the elephant's trunk into the vase; the carnations looked like flat, but frilly, elephant's ears. Then Amy drew "Sink-in-the-Birdbath," a combination of an ordinary kitchen sink sitting on a carved pedestal with a row of little birds drinking from it.

As I watched her, she slowly connected the bird's feet to the sink, adding a rare third element to her picture. It slowly became apparent that the birds represented the faucet and handles of the sink. Like I'd said before, it was weird.

I did try to interest Amy in something else, a board game, Candyland, and though she

was fascinated by gumdrops that could be mountains and trees rendered as candy canes, she tossed it aside in favor of drawing until her fingers were all purple and green and blue and the crayons were worn down well beyond their paper wrappers.

The next time we met, Thursday, Amy and I worked at the picnic table, and I tried again. Games of catch, ring toss, paddleball, children's croquet, all of them failed. I took a spin around the yard on an oversized plastic tricycle, but no go. I set up a game of lawn bowling, but she just wasn't interested. There was even one of those plastic sheets you attach to a hose. I've seen little kids having a ball slipping and sliding down them, and it was plenty warm enough to use that day, near eighty and without a sea breeze. It even had a plastic alligator head that squirted water all over you, but it was another no go.

I was just about to give up when I noticed the shovel and pail among the other toys. I went in to talk to Mrs. Fisher about what I had in mind.

"Go right ahead, Herbert," she told me. "We go down to the beach almost every morning, but I guarantee this is all you'll get." She showed me a pile of drawings on her kitchen table:

"Sail-Seagulls," "Trashcan-Crab," "Woman-with-the-Eel-Grass-Hair."

"I'll see what I can do," I told Mrs. Fisher optimistically. "It's low tide now and I know a few good tide pools."

But Amy was only vaguely interested in tide pools and the assortment of little creatures who called them home. She watched and appeared to listen as I showed her a lady crab, a half-dozen hermit crabs, and even a sea urchin that was trapped in one. Still, I had the uncanny feeling that all these little animals would soon appear on paper, rearranged into new and interesting combinations.

"Don't give up," Mrs. Fisher told me later as I was getting ready to go. "The last two mornings during breakfast Amy's looked at me and asked, 'Herbie?' I think she likes you, and she definitely looks forward to your coming."

That made me feel good—and bad.

"So what happens after I stop coming—not that I am, I mean. I can keep coming even after my project is over."

"That's very sweet of you, Herbert, but I understand this is a short-term project. You needn't feel obligated any further than that. I've enrolled Amy in a program this summer

at the local college, for children with emotional problems. It emphasizes arts and crafts, and I think she'll fit right in. Perhaps you might consider getting a summer job there?"

I shrugged. "Maybe. I'm turning fourteen in July."

"And I have something else to tell you," Mrs. Fisher said. "Amy hasn't wandered now for over a week, which is probably a good sign. I've just learned from her social worker that she used to wander whenever her mother was gone for a few days."

"She was looking for her mother, then."

"I think so."

"And she was probably looking for her mother here, too."

"Possibly."

"And now maybe she's not looking for her any more."

I don't know why—maybe I was too preoccupied when I left that day, thinking about Amy looking for her mother—I didn't notice them right away. It must have been that because usually I'm observant, details as well as obvious things. So I didn't see the two kids leaning against the signpost diagonally across the street from Mrs. Fisher's house. I was too busy feeling sorry for Amy and realizing how lucky I was. Amy's mother had abandoned her, her brother was dead, and though

I'd lost my father, I still had my mother and Mr. Hornton, who was more like a relative than a friend. And of course I had Jake—both Mom and me, we both had Jake.

But when I got my bike and started to ride away, I realized quickly that I should have noticed them, and stopping fast, I turned around to look back. There they were, watching me perhaps, but it was more probable they were watching Mrs. Fisher's house. I got off my bike and fiddled with the chain and gears until they walked away.

"Gang members?" Jake was doubtful.

"You think we don't have gangs around here? Come on, Jake."

"Herbie, this isn't New York City, Boston, or even New Bedford, for crying out loud. We have some tough kids, sure; we have some real wise-ass kids who are in and out of trouble constantly, but gangs?"

"You missed the point. They probably weren't from around here. There's a hundred and eighty kids at my junior high, and I know every one of them by sight, if not by name. But I've never seen these two before."

"High school?"

"Too young. Too small. They looked about my age, maybe a little older."

"Broadhurst Road. There are at least ten houses on that street up for rent this summer. They were probably with people wanting to rent."

"In the middle of the week? This is Thursday, Jake!"

"It happens." He shifted his weight in the rickety wooden chair, reached over for his open beer can nestled in the grass. He didn't need the beer; he didn't need to sit in that particular chair. In fact, I was waiting for it to bust and drop him right on the ground.

"Jake, I didn't see a single car on that street I didn't recognize, *and* I didn't see any grownups or cars from real estate agencies, either."

"So they walked over from a nearby street, probably bored while their parents looked."

But Jake was thinking. I knew it by the way his eyes drifted past me, looked on up our street and pretended to concentrate on a couple of kids playing catch in the road. We were out in the side yard readying up the barbecue grill for some bluefish Mr. Hornton had brought over. Bluefish is a greasy kind of fish but tasty, and best served hot off the grill with a touch of barbecue or Tabasco sauce.

"Come on, Jake." I leaned closer to him; we were sitting face to face on a couple of lawn

chairs. Mom could look out the kitchen window above us and hear every word if she wanted. Thankfully, though, she was making potato salad and watching Phil Donahue on TV. "Think about it. You just said New Bedford? I think Amy's from New Bedford, too. Her brother was killed in a driveby shooting. Don't you think this is worth being worried about—just a little?"

"How do you know about Amy Suares' brother?"

"Mrs. Fisher told me—and you knew, too, didn't you?"

He shifted his weight again; the chair creaked some more. Jake was a big man, two twenty, two forty pounds easy, but he carried it well. He was one of those big guys who move like a gazelle, or a rhino, surprisingly agile and swift when he had to be. He was also an expert marksman, a black belt in karate, and the only detective on Manamesset's small police force. He was sharp and shrewd and quick, and he didn't fool me a bit; he was just as concerned about those two kids I saw as I was.

"What are you really suggesting, Herbert Sawyer?" he asked.

"That Amy may know something these guys don't want her telling anyone, that's what. If you know about New Bedford,

and the shooting, then you must also know this: Amy doesn't talk; she draws. Isn't it possible—or extremely logical—that someone has scared her? And told her *not* to talk?"

"You've got some imagination, kid." He reached behind him for his jacket draped on the back of the chair, looking for a cigarette probably. He came up dry.

"Jake, I have no reason to dream this up, and you know it. If Amy was told to shut up and be quiet, whatever, then she has. She doesn't talk, or hardly at all, that is. She just draws."

"And is she drawing pictures of kids with sawed-off shotguns or AK-47's?" He smiled, but it wasn't his "I'm amused" smile; it was Jake Valari's "I'm getting nervous" smile.

"No. Just animals. And trees and rocks and stuff she sees around her."

"Okay, smart guy, I've got two, no, three things to say to you." He leaned forward, glancing first at the window overhead before he did. "One, Amy Suarez was never much of a talker, even long before her brother was killed. Two, we have no evidence whatsoever that she knows anything about her brother's killers. That was never written up in any of the reports I got, or in any of the

information I received from the people who placed her here—"

I interrupted. "And why was she placed way out here on Cape Cod? We're not even in the same county as New Bedford. And why, and why—" I was suddenly starting to get really excited "—why were *you* getting reports on Amy Suarez?"

I saw a sudden and unnerving glint of ill humor in his blue eyes as he settled back in the chair. "And three, Herbert Sawyer, Jr., even though I've learned to trust your intuition in matters like this, I've got to tell you, boy, this time you're all wet."

"Jake, you didn't answer my question."

"And I don't have to," he said, still smiling. "But I will. Your mother asked me to check into Amy's background."

"Damn." I sank back hard into my chair, nearly rocking it backwards onto the grass.

"Watch your language, Herbie-boy," Jake warned.

"Does Mom know? About Amy's brother, I mean?"

"If it wasn't important, I didn't tell her. That fact didn't seem important."

Now I knew the reason for the smile, but what if . . . what if Jake were wrong? What if there was a connection between those kids eyeing Mrs. Fisher's



house and the murder of Amy's brother? I started to feel less excited, more uneasy.

"Now I have a question for you. If you're so concerned about Amy and Mrs. Fisher, why didn't you stick around her place, or tell her what you suspected, or best of all, why didn't you call me right away?"

"I did stick around. I fooled with my bike, pretended the chain was broken, and waited until they left. Then I went back to Mrs. Fisher's house, but she was getting ready to take Amy to a friend's house for dinner. She was surprised to see me back, so I lied, told her I'd left a book out on the picnic table. She bought it. I left, then came home, planning to tell you now."

"You can be a real wise-ass, do you know that?" But I could see the gears twisting and turning behind his bright blue eyes. "Okay, I'll talk to the chief, maybe do a few checks on the Fisher house tonight, and look around to see if we spot the two kids. Can you give me a good description?"

I smiled, knowing it would be rude. I didn't want to look too cocky, after all. "You got a pencil, Jake? And a dozen sheets of paper? I'll not only give you a description, I'll draw you a picture. I've got those two *memorized*."

\*

I felt pretty good about what I'd done. Even if those two kids—torn flannel shirts; dark, low-slung, oversized jeans; black hightops, unlaced, one Converse, the other Nike; and baseball caps, both on backwards, one Tigers, the other White Sox—had been just standing there doing no more than being typical, I-got-nothing-to-do kids, it was worth it to point them out, to have Jake realize I was nothing if not observant, right down to the fact that one of the two kids had a half-inch scar below his right eye. Probably got it in a gang fight. Maybe he'd been shot.

Then the next day I went over to the high school (they let out twenty minutes after the junior high) and watched the kids get on the bus or walk off down the road to the local hangout, Eddie's Burgers. I used my usual ruse, problem with my bike: gears jammed, chain stuck. But I didn't see one kid who even came close to the two I'd seen hanging around. Strangely, that gave me a sense of relief. It was also good to know Jake was on the ball, doing his job.

So, ruse over, I jumped on my bike and went over to Mrs. Fisher's house. It wasn't one of my scheduled days to work with Amy, but I didn't think

Mrs. Fisher would mind. I knew something was up, however, the moment I dropped my bike in the gravel driveway.

The back door leading into Mrs. Fisher's porch was wide open, the phone was ringing, and I could hear the loud and angry voice of someone I didn't know—a woman's voice, an older woman's voice, though she had no trouble making her point come through loud and clear.

"I've gone through all this before with you, Helen," the woman was saying as I raced up the back stairs two at a time. "I don't want children traipsing all over my back yard. Just look what she's done to my Japanese irises."

I came up behind her, a woman barely my height but twice as wide, dressed in some kind of frumpy sack dress. She was facing Mrs. Fisher, who was standing in the doorway to the kitchen. A frightened and wide-eyed Amy was behind her, clutching at her skirt.

"Oh, I'm sure Amy meant no harm—"

The woman, waving a fistful of purple flowers in the air, cut her off. "Harm or no harm, I don't want her on my property. A woman my age has a right to expect some privacy—and to have that privacy respected by

her neighbors. Just look at these! And it's the same with the rest of my garden. Why I don't think the begonias or bleeding hearts will ever recover. She walked all over them."

"Herbie." Mrs. Fisher spotted me, said my name with a sigh of relief.

"And who—" The woman spun around, and I actually had to step back, nearly falling down the stairs as I did. Her face was like a mask, over-painted, almost grotesque, the face of a woman who had once used makeup for the theater, or for exaggerated effect, and had never stopped doing so. Her skin was white, her cheeks two red spots; her eyebrows, plucked away, were replaced by two thin, dark lines, penciled in. But the most outrageous feature of all was her hair, coarse and black and dyed so many times it was like brittle wire that stuck out in every conceivable direction except where it was loosely coiled over a series of pink rollers framing her face. It was a face out of a frighthouse, or a horror movie, and I instinctively recoiled from it.

"—the hell are you?" she finished, coming right at me, waving the broken flowers in my face. "Not another one of those

foster kids Helen is forever taking in?"

"No, Natalie," I heard Mrs. Fisher say as she neatly slid between the woman and me, Amy still clinging to her skirt. "This is Herbert Sawyer. He comes a few times a week to tutor Amy." Mrs. Fisher was the model of graciousness in that moment, something that stunned me. I would have thrown this horror off my porch in a minute. And then, in her soothing, first-grade teacher's voice, Mrs. Fisher said to me, "And this is Mrs. Natalie Rodgers, Herbert. You recall the woman I mentioned to you just the other day? Natalie played opposite some of the greatest leading men of the forties and fifties. I'm sure you've heard of her, haven't you?"

"Yeah," I mumbled, trying to keep my footing. The top step was two inches behind me. "Yeah, sure I have."

"Bette Davis, Lauren Bacall—" the woman snorted, speaking to me, eyeing me suspiciously as she did—"neither could hold a candle to me. I played opposite the greats, boy, *the greats*."

"But Mrs. Rodgers is upset with me, and Amy," Mrs. Fisher went on gently. "It seems Amy went into her yard this afternoon and unfortunately trampled some of her

flowers." Mrs. Fisher put her hand on Amy's head; I'd never seen the little girl act so frightened. Suddenly I wanted to throw the old hag off the porch myself.

Natalie Rodgers, however, was apparently mollified somewhat and walking straight toward me—I leaped out of her way—headed down the stairs, stopping only once to turn and fling a parting remark at Mrs. Fisher.

"Now, you mind what I said, Helen, next time I *will* call the police. If you're going to take in these foster . . . orphans, then you can do a damn sight better job keeping an eye on them."

"I'll certainly try, Natalie," Mrs. Fisher said as she watched the woman march away across her yard.

"Jeez, Mrs. Fisher, why didn't you just throw her out? She had no right to treat you that way."

The phone started to ring again, but Mrs. Fisher watched Natalie Rodgers disappear around the stone wall and shrubbery that separated their two properties.

"She's had a hard life, Herbert, and she was right. Amy shouldn't have been over there." She looked at me, then down at Amy. "Well, Amy, it looks like I was wrong. Herbie is coming to see us today."

"Mrs. Fisher, I can see—" I looked into her kitchen; the phone was still ringing. "This is bothering you more than you want to tell me—"

"Let me get the phone," she said, her voice still soft, as though she now had to mollify me and not the hideous, has-been movie star who lived next door and valued her stupid flowers more than the feelings of a little girl.

She went into the house, leaving Amy with me.

"She was pretty scary, wasn't she?" I said to Amy. I was still upset, could feel my heart pounding in my chest—with indignation, not fear. Damn, I felt like going over to that old hag's house and showing her what a pair of thirteen-year-old feet could do to her stupid flowers.

Mrs. Fisher came back out; I had heard her pick up the phone inside, say hello, then nothing more. "Wrong number," she said to me.

"Look, let me tell Jake about her. She's got no right—" I started in. Amy had already moved past me, was collecting her crayons and paper.

"Herbert." Mrs. Fisher took my hand and pulled me over to the wicker couch on the porch. "Sit down. Let me tell you something about Natalie Rodgers, because yes, she can be very overbearing, and ex-

tremely rude, but Amy did go into her yard without permission, and she did damage some of Mrs. Rodgers' flowers. Look." She turned her head to the window that overlooked the porch. In a small white vase were two delicate purple Japanese irises. "I should have known where they came from, though they do grow wild here and there where people have thrown them into the compost."

"But it gives her no right to go crazy on you," I insisted, still indignant.

"Herbert." She patted my hand, then let it go. "Natalie has had some hard times; she wasn't always this way. When Charles, my late husband, and I moved here, Natalie and her husband Maurie became good friends of ours. We played bridge, went clamming together, and freely borrowed each other's boats. Her home was . . ." a wistful glance in the direction of Natalie Rodgers' house hidden behind trees, the stone wall, the wild shrubbery ". . . open to the whole town. She was a gracious, elegant hostess, the movie star and her director-husband who came to live here in the summers. You would never have guessed that they were wealthy, well-known celebrities."

"And then she lost her mind, right?" I interjected rudely.

"No, then her husband walked out on her, taking the Japanese maid who planted that flower garden that Natalie guards so jealously. Poor Natalie, she fell apart, was even briefly hospitalized. Her sister came to stay for a while, but eventually it was just Natalie. She slowly let the yard go, the hedges, the trees, and even the house, but that little flower garden in the back yard is the only thing she still seems to care about. Amy got in over the stone wall, there." She pointed across her yard where the stone wall—"Sleeping-Dragon-Rock"—lay so peacefully.

And for a moment I forgot all about Mrs. Fisher, Natalie Rodgers, the trampled flower garden, for there it was! The stones, the shrubbery, the way the wall was lower, and crumbling near the road—the snout of the dragon, of course! I even saw where the idea for a dragon had originated—the plastic alligator head that sprayed water on the plastic sheet. It lay right there in the yard where I had left it.

I realized Mrs. Fisher was being strangely quiet. Quickly, I asked, "So has Amy been wandering again?"

"No." Mrs. Fisher looked across the porch to where Amy was busily drawing, ignoring us, or so it seemed. "I don't

think so, which I would have told Natalie, had she let me. No, Amy had lost her ball." Mrs. Fisher began to smile slowly, a warm and glowing grin. "She was throwing it around the yard, and it went over the wall. I think Amy was simply trying to retrieve it when Natalie Rodgers saw her."

"She was playing ball?" I looked over at Amy, too. Suddenly that seemed worth a few broken irises, some trampled bleeding hearts. "Heck, that's great news!"

"Yes, I think so, too," she said. That's when the phone began to ring again, and I watched as Mrs. Fisher's face suddenly darkened.

Then I knew, or I thought I did. Mrs. Fisher could handle Natalie Rodgers and her idiosyncrasies, her tirades, but this was something she couldn't handle—she was getting prank phone calls.

**"H**usband abandoned her in 1967. Took her years to gain control of the property, house, boat, bank accounts; everything was tied up in both their names. I think he surfaced briefly, around '70 or '71. I remember reading something about it in the paper. Sent her

a letter begging for her forgiveness. She went public with it, she and her sister, who was a lawyer, I think. They used it in court against him. Anyhow, Maurice Rodgers and the Japanese maid, I guess they finally settled down somewhere quietly, someplace where they wouldn't extradite him back. He could be dead now, though; probably is, for all anyone knows. But Natalie Rodgers, she was one of the leading ladies of her day. Real athletic woman. Did all her own stunts, or most of them, anyhow. Rode horses in the circus when she was young. Let's see—"Mr. Hornton paused; he'd been painting, lettering actually, the words *Bonnie Lassie* along the clean white surface of a ten foot dinghy. I settled down on an overturned trash barrel to listen.

He pulled the paintbrush tip through the crease in his bottom lip, said: "I remember her in *Lady Pirate*, one of my favorites. Then there was *Night Angel*, played a prostitute in that one, quite a brave role at the time, and then there was *Moonlight Mistress*."

"She's a wild woman," I countered. "She scared Amy Suares to death. And she upset Mrs. Fisher, though I think something else was bothering her, too."

"Life can do funny things to a person," he told me. "Turn 'em in a direction they didn't ever expect. Take a good person, set them down a strange road."

"I don't care, Mr. Hornton, it's no excuse for frightening a little kid half to death just because she picked some flowers. Amy wouldn't talk to me today. We just drew pictures. She said nothing and she was real nervous, and usually Amy's pretty well controlled. Something's bothering the two of them—Mrs. Fisher and Amy—and I wish I could do more to help them, I really wish I could."

I didn't get to see Amy and Mrs. Fisher for several days after that. Mom and I had to spend the weekend at my Aunt Clem's in Southerdale. Aunt Clem's two youngest, twins, Mel and Maureen, were celebrating their sixth birthday, and after working with the quiet but strangely and deeply introspective Amy, I realized how stupid and superficial my twin cousins were. All they could do was whine and argue and fight. I couldn't wait to get out of there.

So it was with a strange sense of urgency that I raced over to Mrs. Fisher's house as soon as school got out that next

Monday. It's funny to say this, but I felt a kind of emptiness when I missed a day with Amy—or Mrs. Fisher—almost as though they were becoming as important to me as Mr. Hornton or even Jake. Still, I never expected to run into this.

Two police cars were parked out in front of Mrs. Fisher's house, one with its blue dome light still spinning. Worse than that, I recognized Jake's red Firebird in the driveway. I threw my bike down in the grass and ran around to the back.

You can imagine a lot in just a few seconds—your brain conjures up the most horrible things. Those two kids I'd seen, for example, *had* been gang kids, and they'd come back, and . . .

Had thrown a rock through Mrs. Fisher's back porch windows, taking out the glass and screen and a good portion of the wooden frame. I ran up the steps and crashed into the house without even knocking.

Amy was sitting quietly at the kitchen table, drawing on a pad of paper; a policeman was sitting there with her, Officer Fred Andersen. Amy's black-brown eyes lifted to me, then dropped back to her drawing. Officer Andersen knew me, and with a nod he indicated the hall leading to the living room. I

could hear voices from there: Mrs. Fisher's, Jake's, and someone else's. But even as I walked down the hall I was noticing things.

Like the fact that Mrs. Fisher's microwave oven and small kitchen television set were gone and, as I went past her guest room, that the bureau drawers were all pulled out, thrown onto the floor. She'd been . . .

"Robbed." Jake turned from where he was sitting on the orange cat-couch and looked at me.

"Jake?"

But he had no time for me. He stood and walked me back to the kitchen as Mrs. Fisher continued to give the other man, Officer Tommy Randall, a full list of what had been taken from the house.

"Someone threw a rock through the window, probably between one and two. They were out grocery shopping," was all Jake would say.

"Did she tell you about the phone calls?" I blurted out.

He tried not to be surprised, but not about the calls: he knew about them. He was surprised that I knew.

"Jake, it all fits together!" I told him, even as he continued to usher me from the house. "The two kids I saw, the phone calls, and—" I stopped short as



Amy's huge dark eyes came up to meet mine again "—and ... everything else."

"Go home, Herbie," Jake told me. "Go home or I'll have," he nodded at Officer Andersen, "Fred drive you home."

"Home?" I felt my heart drop, or maybe it just stopped beating for a few seconds. Home ... and Mom. Suddenly it was inevitable. I would have to tell Mom everything now.

**I**t turned out to be a thousand times worse than I even could have imagined.

"I wasn't told, and I blame you both, but I blame you more," Mom charged Jake, who stood mutely against the kitchen counter in our house. "This little girl's brother was killed in a driveby shooting? And Herbie saw two kids watching the house? And no one thought to mention it to me? Do you know, do you begin to know, the hell I've been through with him this last year? Good God, Jacob Valari, I nearly lost my son once— isn't that enough?" And then she marched right up to him, and I thought for a moment she was going to slap him. Instead, shaking, she said straight to his face: "I trusted you to tell me the truth, to look out for my son, and instead you do this. I never want to see you again. Do

you hear me? I never, ever want to see you again."

I walked with Jake out to his car. It was a cool evening, gulls overhead looking like the black silhouettes I'd drawn with Amy the day I met her, and the day I should have gone home and told Mom the truth about her.

"She'll calm down," I said, not too convincingly. "You'll see. Call her in a day or two."

He leaned one hand on the driver-side door, shook his head. "I've never seen a woman so angry. I swear if she'd had a gun she would have shot me." He was looking back at the house, looking as small and defeated as I'd ever seen him. "Can't blame her, though. We did it wrong, Herbie. We should have told her everything."

"No. No, it's not my fault this happened, or yours. Besides, I'm more worried about Amy and Mrs. Fisher. I guess they won't be staying home tonight, will they?"

Jake looked off, up the street again, but this time there were no kids in the road. In fact, it was almost dismally quiet for our section of the neighborhood. No dogs barking, no kids shrieking as they raced across lawns playing twilight games of tag, no badminton games, no smoky aromas from charcoal grills wafting down the road.

"We betrayed your mother," he said sadly. "She asked me once if I'd be honest with her, if I'd tell her if I thought you were in danger. But somehow I couldn't this time, it just didn't seem fair . . ."

The door behind us slammed, and I spun around. It was Mom, signaling me to get in the house—and to get in now.

"She says she's calling the school first thing in the morning, going to talk to my teacher, my counselor, and the principal to complain about the whole community service project. She's going to write the local paper, too, and make an appointment to see the superintendent. She works in his office; she says she plans to lodge a full complaint against the whole program and everyone involved in it."

But Jake knew this. It had all been part of Mom's ten minute tirade that ended with her storming out onto our front porch and breaking into tears.

"Gotta go, Herbie," he said, slapping me on the shoulder. "I'm sure we'll be seeing each other, but for now, your involvement with Helen Fisher and Amy Suares, it's over."

"Heck, Jake, maybe it is nothing but a robbery. Maybe it's got nothing at all to do with Amy Suares." But I had no

hope in my voice, absolutely none.

He just nodded, said, "I'll see you around, pal," got into his car, and was gone.

I didn't talk to my mother the following morning. I had nothing to say to her. She was just as sullen and silent as I was. She packed my lunch, wished me a "good day," and was off to work. For a full twenty minutes I sat and stared at that lunch on the table, long enough to hear the school bus pull up and leave. Of course I had my bike, but when I jumped on it, it wasn't for the junior high I was headed.

I'd thought for a while about going to see Mr. Hornton, tell him my side of the story, convince him I was perfectly safe working with Amy, and that this was just a random robbery, that it had nothing to do with her, or me.

But I knew he'd probably be just as skeptical as Jake. Because the truth was, no matter how much I disagreed with my mother, no matter how over-protective she was being, I knew in my heart of hearts I'd be doing the same if I were her.

And yet despite that, despite knowing she was right and I was wrong, I did it. I did what I never should have done. I lied.

And I got away with it. And that's pretty strange, when you stop and think about it—that what I did worked only because I had a pretty decent reputation to start with.

"Herbie?" I heard my mother open the door, the jangle of keys in her hand, the anxiousness of her voice even though she'd phoned home, knew I was here. Don't forget, she worked for the school department, and when I showed up missing at school, they called her right away. It's part of the system we have at the junior high: if you're missing and a parent hasn't called in, they call you. Anyhow, she knew where I was.

"Herbert Sawyer, Jr.," but that wasn't relief in her voice; it was despair—and anger. "What do you think you're doing..."

Then she stopped. We were on the porch, Amy and me, crayons and blank paper spread all over our old card table. Amy looked up at Mom with her huge brown-black eyes and blinked.

"This is Amy Suares, Mom," I told my mother softly. "And this is what Amy does, she draws, and that's about all she does. But sometimes she does talk. She's talked to me—probably more than she has to any-

one else. Mrs. Fisher said it was okay for me to bring her over this morning for a little while. I lied to her, Mom. I told her there was a teachers' workshop and I had no school today. I told her you wanted to meet Amy. Mrs. Fisher will be by around noon; she's gone into Northport to talk to a fellow who's coming out to fix her porch."

"This is... Amy?" My mother almost crept onto the porch. I could see tears forming in her eyes as she reached out to pick up one of Amy's pictures from the card table.

"Yeah, and that's your toaster, or your clock. We call it 'Toaster-Clock'; see how she's put a clock face on the toaster? And this is 'Refrigerator-Rooster.' Can you see how she's put a rooster's head on the refrigerator?"

But Mom wasn't seeing much of anything. She was crying, looking first at me, then at Amy. It was a very soft crying, and she turned away from us both and disappeared into the house. Then we heard her cough, and there were sounds of cabinet doors being opened and shut.

When she came back, her eyes were red but dry, and she was carrying four chocolate chip cookies and a little cup of milk on a tray that she set

down next to Amy. Then, pulling a wicker chair up close to Amy's side, she looked at me, and then at her, and once again she said to us both, "So this is Amy."

"These are beautiful, absolutely beautiful," she told Mrs. Fisher over coffee as Amy and I took a brief break from drawing to watch *Sesame Street*. I could hear them talking behind us.

"This little girl is certainly very talented and so..." My mother sighed, caught her breath, finished. "Precious, isn't she?"

I turned my head enough to see that she was staring at Amy, sitting close beside me on the sofa, her little hand resting on mine. Every now and then she'd turn my hand over, as though examining it, then turn it back.

"I'm just so ashamed of myself," Mom went on. "Of what I did to Herbie... and to Jake. I..." She blew her nose, had been going back and forth this way the last twenty minutes, alternately haranguing herself, then apologizing.

"What you did was only natural, Mrs. Sawyer," I heard Mrs. Fisher say. "Someone should have been more open with you from the start, so I blame myself as well. I should have

called you personally and told you Amy's history."

"Somehow, though," my mother said, her voice choking again, "that history doesn't seem so important right now." And then she sat up straight, faced Mrs. Fisher, and announced, "Of course my son can continue to work with Amy. I... I insist on it."

They picked up the kids two days later, sons of a local roofer who had taken a day off from school to help him on a job. They were from a neighboring town and used odd moments—lunch hour, or a break when their father had to run to Wareham to pick up more supplies—to case out houses and summer cottages they'd return to later to break into. I identified them easily enough; in addition, being just a couple of stupid kids, they'd left their fingerprints all over everything. In their dad's garage, where he kept a couple of unregistered pickups he was working on, the police found everything that had been taken from Mrs. Fisher's house, plus a lot of stuff taken from houses in another town where the father had been doing previous jobs.

It seemed straightforward enough, and no one was more relieved than my mother to

learn the kids weren't gang members looking to snuff out me, Amy, and Mrs. Fisher. But that wasn't the end of it, not by a long shot.

You see, Mom and Helen Fisher became friendly, and as the weeks went by, Mom would stop by while I was working with Amy, to sit and chat and have a cup of coffee. She was as fascinated with Amy as I was, as everyone was who got to know her. She was also what she called "terribly proud" of me, for bringing Amy somewhat out of her shell. Amy's counselor praised me, too, and Amy's social worker thought I was an angel, though all I'd done was talk to Amy, draw with her—and teach her to play catch.

Which we were doing outside about three weeks after the robbery incident. Amy had a bright orange ball we were tossing back and forth in the side yard, after we did our obligatory drawings, that is. Amy was laughing, which was a rare but wonderful sound, and running toward me, arms out wide to catch the ball. She and I were having a great time, and as it started to get dark, Amy began to bat the ball, bumping it with her little hands like you might a volleyball, and setting it higher and higher, making me run like a

dog to catch it and toss it back to her.

And then she batted it right over the stone wall, through the hedges and shrubbery into Mrs. Rodgers' yard.

For a moment I just stood and stared. It was getting dark, and when I looked into Mrs. Fisher's porch, I saw that she and Mom had gone into the house. Mom had a date tonight; Jake was coming here to pick her up. We'd just had dinner with Amy and Mrs. Fisher; it was working out to be a real nice arrangement for the four of us.

And then I thought, what the heck, I can be over that wall, grab the ball, and be back in a second. I wasn't a little six-year-old kid; I wouldn't touch a single flower. So I went over to Amy and whispered to her, "I'm going to get the ball. Don't tell Mrs. Fisher."

Of course Amy wouldn't, she still barely spoke, but the look in her wide, brown-black eyes was horrified. She shook her head back and forth and said, "No, Herbie, no."

"Look, it's bright orange. I'll be able to see it in a minute. You stay here. You..." I repeated it for emphasis. "...stay here."

The stone wall was one of those wide ones, rare for the Cape, made from carefully

knitted together boulders and rocks some farmer had pulled from the sandy soil over a hundred years ago. This had probably been pasture land once; I doubt anyone could have done much farming here, so close to the water. As I pulled myself on top of it, I could see the fascination—why Amy might have wandered around here. You could walk this wall—you could walk it two abreast—but with the overgrown shrubbery hugging it, it had been hard to see how large it really was.

Which made it easier for me, actually. I figured I'd just walk along the wall, around to the back of Mrs. Rodgers' yard, and look through the tree branches until I saw the orange ball. But as I did, spying the ball where it had landed in the middle of a bed of begonias and impatiens, I saw something else, too.

I saw the "Caterpillar-Bones," the drawing Amy had made a few weeks ago. They lay in a neat row, almost perfectly spherical boulders that had toppled from the wall behind the garden and did resemble, somewhat, a caterpillar. Amy must have seen them, and possibly a caterpillar at the same time, drawn them into one. . . .

I decided to stay up on the wall until I got behind the flower garden, reach down for the ball, and take off before

Mrs. Rodgers even knew I was there. I was behind her large, dark, forbidding house. It almost looked as though no one was home, there were no lights on, but I could hear the sound of a fan. I had to move fast.

I ran down the wall, careful not to stumble—parts of it had given way on either side—and then I stopped dead.

These wide unusual walls are found all over New England. I recalled my social studies teacher, Mr. Locks, mentioning them once. They were a way to clear the land as well as to mark one's property line, but some walls were so wide that local historians had wondered why they'd been built that way. Behind Mrs. Rodgers' house the wall was a good six feet across, easy.

And right before me was a depression in the wall where rocks had been moved and put back again, only to settle down later on what was unmistakably a body, or rather a skeleton, no, on a *pair* of skeletons. Two of them. There were rocks scattered across them, but I could plainly see the curved outline of ribs, a pair of femurs, parts of what must have been a skull.

Animals had taken some of the bones. The skeletons did not look complete, but they were unmistakably human, the

"bones" in Amy Suares' "Caterpillar-Bones."

I left the ball right where it had landed and ran down the wall, jumping safely over to Mrs. Fisher's side. This wasn't going to be easy, and I wondered briefly if Jake carried smelling salts in his car, because that was his red Firebird pulling into Mrs. Fisher's driveway right now. And there was Amy patiently waiting for me, showing a look of concern and surprise that I wasn't carrying her orange ball in my arms.

I started across the yard, wondering how I was going to tell Jake, wondering what the exact "procedure" would be, though I had no lack of faith in him. A hundred things were tumbling through my head in that moment. The letter Mrs. Rodgers had received from her

husband had been a fake, of course, or just an earlier letter she had changed the date on. That would be easy to prove. Just as easy to explain was how she got them into the wall: hadn't Mr. Hornton told me she'd once been a circus performer? I would have bet anything that twenty-five years ago she'd been a strong woman. Yes, that all seemed easy enough; it would be Jake's job to unravel that part of it.

For I had no doubt that what I'd found were the skeletal remains of Maurice Rodgers and the Japanese servant he had supposedly run away with. And I understood, too, why Natalie Rodgers didn't want little children playing around her flower garden. Yes, all of that was real easy; what wasn't going to be easy, was this . . .

Telling my mother.



# UNSOLVED

by  
Robert Kesling

*Unsolved at present, that is, but can you work it out?*

*The answer will appear in the August issue.*

TMS (The Master Spy) thought things out carefully before stealing the plans for a revolutionary new auto. Knowing he would be suspected, he enlisted the help of an artist, baker, carpenter, dentist, and engineer. Each of his confederates would keep the plans for one day, then pass them onto the next. TMS made certain that each confederate knew *only* the person from whom he would receive the plans and the person to whom he would deliver them. Each of the confederates was married.

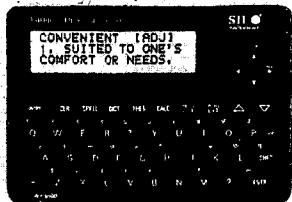
Over the weekend, TMS broke into the safe of the auto manufacturer and took the vital plans. On Monday morning, he delivered them to the first accomplice. On Friday (after the initial furor abated) he planned to retrieve them from the last.

- (1) Andy met with Mr. Katz and the artist, receiving the stolen plans from one and passing them to the other.
- (2) Jane's husband met with Mr. Norris and the engineer (who was not Bart), in one order or the other.
- (3) Freda's husband (who is not Mr. Norris) met with Mr. Osman and Carl in passing the plans along.
- (4) Helen's husband met with Dave and the carpenter, in one sequence or another.
- (5) Neither Greta nor Ilene is married to the carpenter, nor did their husbands ever meet him.
- (6) The artist is not acquainted with the dentist.
- (7) Earl never met the baker; Mr. Lange is not the dentist.
- (8) Carl, who is not the carpenter, is not married to Ilene.
- (9) Mr. Maris did not handle the stolen plans on Friday.

The best laid plans of mice and men "gang aft agley," as Robert Burns wrote long ago. The last man to receive the plans learned through the TV news that the reward for recovery of the plans was appreciably more than the pay offered by TMS. In return for immunity, he confessed. Investigators quickly traced back, through the other confederates, to TMS himself.

*What was the sequence in which the stolen plans were passed along? Who was the money-hungry informer?*

# MAIL ORDER MALL



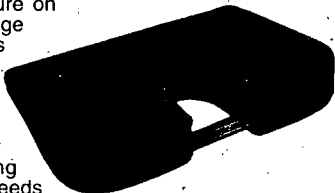
## AMERICAN HERITAGE DICTIONARY

The Seiko American Heritage Dictionary Deluxe desk size edition (WP-5500) combines two references and a calculator into a convenient high speed product. The dictionary features over 80,000 entries; The Roget's II Thesaurus provides 500,000 synonyms; a spellchecker permits you to check 100,000 words; and there's even a personal dictionary that meets your special needs. The WP-5500 features large display and standard keyboard. The sleek design measures 5 3/4" x 4 7/8" and features lithium batteries and memory backup for battery replacement. The

WP-5500 is great for crossword puzzles and word games. \$99.00 (\$5.95) #A2065.

## TUSH CUSH

Do you suffer from low back pain? If so, you'll certainly appreciate this scientifically designed seat which works to relieve and prevent back pain: first, it suspends the tail bone (coccyx) in the air and reduces the pressure on and within the lower spinal discs; second, the unique wedge shape tips the pelvis forward to help restore the spine's natural lumbar curve. Constructed of highly resilient polyurethane foam, the "Tush Cush" comes with a removable, machine washable cover. It measures 14"x18" and features a handle for easy toting. Perfect for your much-desired comfort wherever and whenever you want it: at home, in the office, in your car, sporting events, theaters, wheelchairs or anywhere your "tush" needs a "cush"ion! \$39.98 (\$5.75) #A1967.



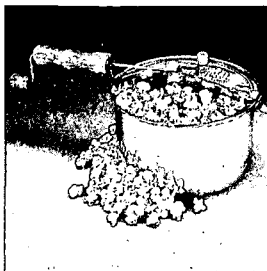
## PORTABLE GYM

This portable lifeline gym is a 2-pound gym that tones and shapes all your muscle groups in 1/4th the time required by barbells. The secret is dynamic variable resistance supplied by its indestructible design that instantly adjusts from three pounds to 350 lbs. of resistance. Illustrated exercise booklet tells you how to move from one exercise to another. It comes with a 27" lifting bar, breaks down in the middle with stainless steel locking pins, jogging belt, 6 1/2 ft. cable, door attachment and foot stirrups, neatly packed in its own carrying case. In addition, it converts to a unique treadmill, pulley system and variable resistance machine. Lightweight package is ideal for the mobile professional who enjoys exercising, even when away from home. Free video included. #A1937 \$49.98 (\$6.00)



**TO ORDER:** Send check with item number for total amounts, plus shipping & handling shown in ( ) payable to **Mail Order Mall**, Dept. 075 AR, P.O. Box 3006, Lakewood, N.J. 08701, or call **TOLL FREE 1-800-722-9999**. NJ residents add 6% sales tax. We honor MasterCard/Visa. Sorry, no Canadian, foreign, or C.O.D. orders. Satisfaction Guarantee. 30 day money back guarantee for exchange or refund. Allow 30 days for delivery. **CALL TOLL FREE TODAY! 1-800-722-9999.**

# MAIL ORDER MALL

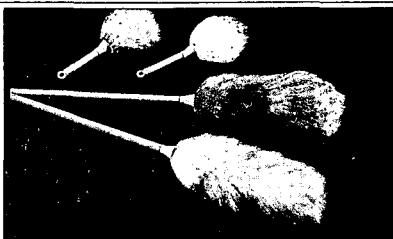


## ▼ THEATER II POPPER

This incredible through-the-handle, bottom-stirring popcorn popper uses stovetop power to reach the same temperature (465° F) as commercial poppers. Popcorn explodes to full expansion, a faster finish preserves tenderness, and nearly 100 percent of the popcorn pops! Result: six quarts of the best popcorn you've ever tasted in just three minutes, start to finish. Has a wooden handle for a safe grip, and pops with a minimum amount of oil or butter for delicious diet popcorn. (Approximately 500 calories per six quarts). Produces tender, fluffy, old-fashioned movie theater popcorn in just minutes. Made in USA. \$27.98 (\$5.75) #A1963.

## ▼ LAMBSWOOL DUSTERS

Lambswool contains a natural static charge that makes dust literally leap off surfaces. Our dusters are imported from England. They are the fluffiest, highest quality lambswool in the world! We offer a set of four lambswool dusters: Our 27" duster; our duster which extends to more than four feet will let you reach high corners, top shelves, overhead lights and collapses to 28"; and two mini dusters for extra fragile objects. \$22.98 (\$4.95) #A1870.



## ▼ STEP UP TO A HEALTHIER YOU



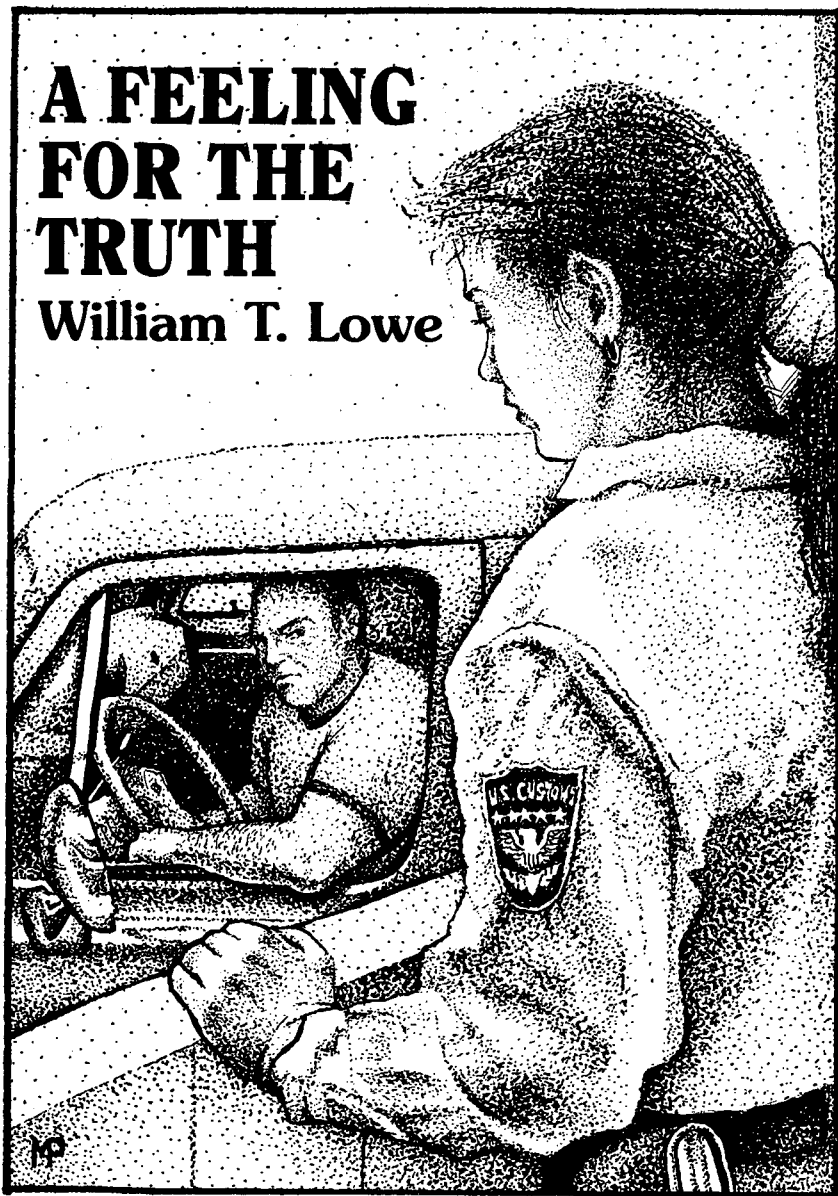
Doctors, physical trainers and athletes agree that stair climbing is one of the best forms of aerobic exercise. Achieve your fitness goals without the severe jarring or pounding associated with running or jogging. The ExerClimb improves cardiovascular function, increases major muscle groups to tighten and tone lower body, thighs, hips, buttocks and calves. Results can be seen with 20 minute workout three times a week. The hydraulic powered ExerClimb features sturdy steel construction, magnum series shocks and individual tension adjustment. This light-weight, 28 pound machine fits in virtually any size room making it ideal for apartment dwellers. Opened it measures 42 inches high x 30 inches long by 22 inches wide. Its unique fold-away feature makes storage a snap. Easy to carry along anywhere. Some assembly required, using only screwdriver and pliers. To make it ever more appealing, the ExerClimb has a trim price tag that anyone can appreciate. "Step" into better shape. As with any exercise program, consult your physician. 90 day warranty. \$119.98 (\$16.95) #A1998.

**TO ORDER:** Send check with item number for total amounts, plus shipping & handling shown in ( ) payable to Mail Order Mall, Dept. 075 AH; P.O. Box 3006, Lakewood, N.J. 08701, or call **TOLL FREE 1-800-722-9999**. NJ residents add 6% sales tax. We honor MasterCard/Visa. Sorry, no Canadian, foreign, or C.O.D. orders. Satisfaction Guaranteed. 30 day money back guarantee for exchange or refund. Allow 30 days for delivery. **CALL TOLL FREE TODAY! 1-800-722-9999.**

FICTION

# A FEELING FOR THE TRUTH

William T. Lowe



**S**outhbound traffic from Canada into New York was usually light on Friday afternoons. Only four of the seven Customs booths at the border were manned. For Inspector Cass Gilbert, the work had been routine; she had passed through Canadians bound for a weekend of shopping in Plattsburgh and several New York residents returning from day trips to Montreal.

They were legitimate citizens on legitimate errands. But Cass, who was twenty-eight and had been in Customs for two years, knew there were always some persons intent on evading the law.

From her glass-enclosed booth she could see for miles in every direction. The Champlain Port of Entry was set on a broad treeless plain; its complex of severely functional buildings housed Customs, Immigration, the Border Patrol, and various law agencies. A few yards up the highway was their counterpart, a Canadian station that handled traffic crossing into Canada. Both installations flanked New York Interstate 87, the superhighway from Albany to Montreal.

Cass watched as a big Cadillac slid noiselessly to a stop outside her booth. Automatically she noted the occupants: a couple in the front seat, both

past middle age, well dressed, man driving. One child in the rear, strapped into a car seat and surrounded by stuffed toys. Vermont plates on the car.

Cass's first questions were standard: "Where were you born? Where do you live?" (A Customs inspector's initial duty was to establish nationality and citizenship.) Then, "How long were you in Canada?" Satisfied with the answers, Cass asked, "Anything to declare? Anything you bought in Canada?"

The wife leaned across the seat, smiling, anxious to be helpful. She gestured toward the little girl. "Only a new Barney for our granddaughter." To the child she said, "You love Barney, don't you, dear?"

The child clutched the purple dinosaur and nodded.

"And Barney loves you, doesn't he?"

The child nodded again. "Barney loves me," she murmured.

The woman beamed at Cass. "Isn't she the cutest thing?"

Cass gave her a brief smile. She looked at the husband; paunchy, fraternal rings, salesman's smile. "Anything else?" she asked.

He shook his head, grinning broadly. "We hit a lot of restaurants; I put on about ten pounds," he laughed. "I bought

a couple of shirts. Nothing to declare."

Not likely, Cass thought. Three days in Montreal and nothing to declare? Shoppers from the States went to Montreal to take advantage of a favorable exchange rate that made the U.S. dollar worth much more than the Canadian dollar. These people obviously had money and liked to spend it. Cass made a decision.

"Drive down there, please." She pointed to the secondary Customs inspection area.

"What for?" The smiles disappeared from both faces. "What for?"

Swiftly she made notes on a printed slip and put it under the car's windshield wiper. "Drive down there, sir, for a secondary inspection."

The man began to bluster. "Look here, young lady, our taxes pay your salary . . ."

"Please move on, sir, you're blocking traffic," Cass said. (First rule for inspectors handling the public: be polite.)

She stepped back. The man growled something and put the big car in gear. At the secondary inspection station her request would have the car thoroughly checked, the trunk, the interior, the luggage.

Cass frowned as she watched the Cadillac move away. The woman had been pushy, the

man patronizing, but there had been nothing overtly suspicious. She had acted on a hunch. She had been assigned to Passenger Traffic for just over a week; maybe she'd been too hasty.

"This job calls for a lot of snap judgments," Cass had said to her friend and supervisor, Sam Barry. "What do we have to go on? Instinct, common sense, body language, hunches?"

Sam grinned. "All of the above," he said. "Just call it a feeling for the truth."

Cass looked beyond the passenger traffic lanes at the commercial lanes to the west. That was where the big trucks and cargo carriers had to stop for inspection. She had been assigned to Commercial for a year. That's where the action is, she thought.

Customs is a branch of Treasury, charged with collecting revenue due Uncle Sam. This brings Customs head to head with smugglers, traffickers in anything with resale value: armaments, narcotics, currency, even people.

To Cass, the work on the commercial side had been exciting and rewarding. Bills of lading and cargo declarations were carefully checked and spot checks made. A load of lumber billed as pine had been

found to be much more valuable black walnut. A scanning device had detected fifty slot machines under a load of mattresses. A load of furniture weighed more than it should have because of the cases of assault rifles hidden under false flooring.

The intercom in her booth sounded. It was Carter Kelso, one of the inspectors working the secondary position this afternoon. Carter was a classmate; Cass had met him during the eleven week course at the Law Enforcement Training Center in Glynnco, Georgia. He was reporting on the Cadillac Cass had sent over.

"Good call," he said. "The dame had a new fur coat in the trunk, still in the box."

"How about those stuffed toys in the back seat?" she asked.

"There's a pink rabbit with a diamond ring sewed up in its tummy," Carter told her. A skilled appraiser would present the Cadillac owners with a statement of duty owed.

"Thanks, Carter," Cass said.

"Any time." The intercom went off.

Sam, her supervisor, had walked up quietly and stood outside her booth. "Carter told me you scored," he said. "That make you feel better about this assignment?"

Sam was the only person on the station who knew her first name was actually Cassandra, and he had kept it a secret. Cass knew she could confide in him.

"Of course I'm glad we nailed them," she said, "but the last day I was in Commercial we short-stopped three missile launchers waybilled as agricultural machinery. Over here some rich dame tries to sneak in a fur coat, or some guy hides a watch in his shoe." She shrugged. "It's quite a change of pace."

"Seems pretty penny-ante?" asked Sam.

She gave him a smile. "Sometimes."

"Maybe you'll change your mind."

Toward six o'clock the stream of cars quickened. It was early spring, but dusk was approaching. There was a glow in the sky from the little town of Champlain two miles distant. Three cars were waiting in line, but Cass was concentrating on the one outside her booth.

She suspected it had been stolen. It was an almost new Chevrolet four-door sedan in a bright pastel color, a model she knew to be favored by professional car thieves. Cars stolen in Canada were often driven to



Delaware or Pennsylvania for shipment overseas.

The driver had been a shade too ready with his answers. He was French-Canadian, young, clean-shaven, wearing the usual black leather jacket. His license said he was Pascal Favreau of Brossard, Quebec. There were two men in the back seat. Stolen cars didn't usually carry passengers, but they could be clever window dressing.

A light blinked on the screen in the booth, and the computer confirmed her hunch; the car was stolen. The driver was smiling at Cass, unaware that his license had been scanned electronically and the state police alerted.

"These are my oncles," he said, pointing at the men in the rear seat. "They have been visiting my mother. They live in Pittsburgh. I take them to the train in Albany." He reached for the ignition key. "I go now, madame?"

"Not yet." Cass looked at the two men. They were both middle-aged, dressed in shabby suits with shirts and ties. To the nearer man Cass said, "Where were you born, sir?"

"They are born in Canada," the driver cut in, "and now they live . . ."

Cass silenced him with a wave of her hand. "They have

to answer for themselves." She tried again. "Where were you born?"

The men were both smiling and nodding at her. "Peetsborg," they chorused, "Peetsborg."

There are foreign nationals who work in the States, Cass reminded herself, and some of them don't speak English very well. Most of them, however, don't ride around in stolen cars. These must be a couple of aliens, she decided. Probably gave this kid every cent they had to bring them across.

She signaled for an INS team. Let Immigration make the decision, check for working papers, criminal records, establish nationality. She hit the switch that changed the traffic light above her booth from green to red.

"My oncles do not speak so well," the driver offered. He saw the INS team approaching and turned to Cass in alarm. "We can go now? I take them to Albany . . ."

The two agents from Immigration and Naturalization stood by the side of the car. Both men wore sidearms. "Step out of the car, please."

The driver turned to Cass in desperation. "How about if I leave them here and come back for them?"

"No," Cass said politely. "You have to go with these men."

The driver looked back sorrowfully as he and the two men were led away. A man came to take the Chevrolet to a garage where it would be checked by a detail of the New York State Auto Theft Unit.

Cass recalled the time when she and another inspector in Commercial had checked out a tanker truck. Instead of fifty thousand gallons of fuel oil, it contained forty almost suffocated aliens from Turkey. She had no doubt that these two would be denied admission and detained.

"Right," Sam said later, "and that kid Favreau was arrested. The Montreal Urban Police want him."

"Why would he try to bring aliens across in a stolen car?" Cass asked.

"Way I see it," Sam answered, "he was moonlighting, trying to pick up some extra bucks. He's hired to drive the stolen car across, probably to some transfer point like Glens Falls, where he takes Amtrak back to Montreal. But he contracts with some other people to bring across a couple of illegals. And he got nailed."

Cass shook her head. "A dumb thing to do."

Sam grinned at her. "Be thankful for the stupid ones. They make our job easier."

\*

It was dark when the dog show man appeared, on his way home from somewhere in Ontario. Cass had passed him through northbound two days ago and had been hoping to see him again. He was a big man, overweight, balding, driving a Mercury station wagon.

The rear of the wagon was taken up by a large dog cage. The back seat was folded down, and the space was filled with sacks of feed, blankets, water jugs, and other gear. A velour banner with gold letters reading SUNSET KENNEL was draped over the top of the cage. Several blue ribbons were pinned to the banner.

"How-do, officer," said the man. He had stepped out of the car, and Cass noticed again that he was dressed in riding pants with highly polished boots, a checkered vest, and an ascot tie.

Cass remembered his name. "Evening, Mr. Atkins. How's Queenie?"

"Never better, thanks."

Queenie was a female golden retriever. When she heard Cass's voice, she sat up in her cage and whined. Cass stepped to the rear window and put her hand through to the side of the cage. Queenie sniffed at it and wagged her tail. "Hello, pretty girl," said Cass softly. She

scratched the dog under her chin, avoiding the sharp bristles on her muzzle, and stroked her shaggy ears.

For the convenience of the Canadian inspectors the dog's rabies vaccination certificate was in a plastic holder taped to the inside of the window. The dog's formal name was Elizabeth Tudor the Third.

"How was the show?" Cass asked.

"Queenie did it again," the man said proudly. "Took Best of Show." He held up a colorful ribbon for Cass to see. "There's another little do in Pointe Claire tomorrow," he said. "Maybe we can make it a double-header this week."

Cass had learned that he took the dog to a show almost every week. "Large or small, we hit 'em all," the man had told her. "I'm retired, nothing better to do. But we do have fun, don't we, Queenie girl?"

Cass waved him on. The dog's soulful brown eyes watched her as the wagon pulled away. "Poor dog," Cass said.

She punched a button on the intercom. "Sam, remember the dog show man I told you about? He just went through, and now I'm sure he's dirty."

Sam's voice was calm. "I hope you're right, Cass. We'll let Smith decide what to do." Two

minutes later he called back. "Smith's office, seven o'clock."

The director's office was small and dominated by a large desk holding a computer and several scanning screens. Whitehaired and dignified, Courtland Smith looked more like a minister than the director of one of the nation's busiest ports of entry.

"Is there any physical evidence that this man is transporting narcotics?" asked Director Smith.

"No, sir."

Cass stood in front of the desk, Sam a pace behind her. Also in the room were Dale Handford, a plainclothes Customs agent, and a DEA agent named Matt Riley. Cass knew what the director could be thinking: here's a young inspector, just transferred to Passenger Traffic, seeing a smuggler in every car. It had happened before.

"Suspicious circumstances," offered Sam, backing her up.

Dale Handford spoke up. "Officer Gilbert brought this to my attention a couple of days ago. A man taking a dog to a kennel show in Canada could give himself almost perfect cover for transporting narcotics."

Smith nodded. "You say he makes a trip across every week?"

"Sometimes twice a week," Sam answered.

"But how many dog shows can there be in Canada?" asked Riley, the DEA man.

"It wouldn't have to be a sanctioned show," Cass told him. "There's always a neighborhood show, or a charity event, in the papers. But I think that's just his cover," she said stubbornly. "All he has to do is know how to talk about them. He may not go anywhere near a dog show."

Smith nodded again. "Inspector Gilbert, exactly what makes you think this man is not entering his dog in a kennel show somewhere?"

Cass took a deep breath. Sam and Agent Handford had heard her idea before, but this would be new to Director Smith. She looked at him squarely.

"Because the dog's ears aren't trimmed right."

Behind her she heard what might have been a laugh from Matt Riley, but she went on. "On a dog like that, the hair above the ears should be trimmed down. It doesn't hurt, and it makes the dog's ears look lower. Judges like that. And the muzzle should be clipped. That hasn't been done, either."

She paused. Everybody in the room was looking at her. Cass gestured at Sam and Agent Handford. "We discussed

this two days ago, but we decided that the grooming, or lack of it, was an oversight, something the owner would take care of before the next show."

She took another deep breath. "The owner, this man Atkins, passed through tonight and told me he had just won a Best of Show." She paused again. "There's no way that dog could have taken a Best of Show in even a small affair. Not with those ears."

She stopped. Nobody said anything; they were all looking at Director Smith.

He gave Cass a brief smile and looked around the office. "I'll buy that," he said mildly. "Now the question is, what do we do about it?" He glanced at Riley. "Matt, how are you fixed for manpower?"

Cass knew what he meant. They could apprehend the dog show man here and shake down his vehicle. But if they found any contraband, as Cass thought they would, they would forfeit the chance of locating the man's contacts in Canada. If Riley could detail a DEA team to work with the Canadians and follow Atkins, they would have a shot at breaking up the distribution ring.

"We can get right on it," Riley said. "Sam, have your people point this guy out, and we'll

handle it with our friends up the road. No sweat."

Cass said, "Atkins mentioned another show tomorrow. He may cross again in the morning."

Dale Handford had a thought. "If this is part of the cocaine pipeline from Florida, they could be working the same dodge somewhere else. The Buffalo district, maybe."

"Good point," said Director Smith. "Anything else?"

"One thing," Cass said hesitantly, "be careful with the dog. He probably keeps the poor thing tranquilized."

"We'll be careful," said Riley.

The meeting was over; the men filed out the door. Director Smith held out his hand to Cass. "Thanks, inspector," he said. "By the way, my daughter-in-law shows cocker spaniels. She's very fussy about their ears."

When her shift was over Cass went home to a beagle named Kelly and a partially finished paper for her college sociology class. As she played with the puppy she thought about the forlorn look in Queenie's brown eyes. "Be glad you're not in show business, fella," she said to Kelly.

The next day, Saturday, Cass and a shift of inspectors would work the north-bound traffic.

The briefing this morning was on the familiar subject of narcotics. "As you know," a Customs agent told them, "there's a steady stream of cocaine flowing north into Canada from Florida. Payment comes back down in the form of good U.S. currency. The DEA says heroin is becoming the drug of choice in some big cities. . . . Nigeria has learned the tricks of the trade from Colombia.

"Our informants tell us there's a big push on untaxed liquor going into Canada through our smaller ports. Good luck this weekend. . . ."

Right, thought Cass as she walked out to her booth. With any luck at all, we'll nail Atkins; he'll be hard to miss with all of us watching for him. She thought again of Queenie. "Poor dog," she whispered.

"Whoowie, look what we got here!" A man was grinning at her from the window of a van. Another man sat beside him. "A little girl all dressed up in a you-ne-form!"

The driver was leering at her, hoping for some reaction. She saw the passenger pull at the driver's sleeve. "Cool it, Jerry," he muttered. "We're in a hurry."

Cass gritted her teeth. Here was another stone age relic, one of the few remaining males

who couldn't accept the notion of a woman in authority. First rule, be polite.

"Where were you born? Where do you live?" Cass asked pleasantly.

"New York," answered the passenger.

"What's it to you, honey?" answered the driver.

The van was old, with faded paint and rust showing along the fender seams. On the side was lettered the name of a painting contractor with a Syracuse address. Both men wore workclothes.

Cass faced the driver. "Where are you heading in Canada?"

"Got a couple of kitchen painting jobs in Chateaugay," the driver answered. "Now you be careful not to hurt yourself with that pretty little gun you're wearing," he said with exaggerated concern.

Cass ignored him. She rapped on the side of the van. "Let's take a look inside."

"Sure thing, little lady."

The driver stepped out and walked back to the rear of the van. He was a big man with thinning brown hair and overdeveloped biceps displayed by a tight shirt. He opened the single wide door. "Help yourself."

Cass stood in the opening and looked inside. There was a strong smell of paint thinner.

She saw a jumble of painting gear, dropcloths, an extension ladder, a box that held brushes. There was a gallon of oil-based white primer on the floor, and there were three new cases of primer against the wall. She saw two worn and scuffed suitcases on the floor in the front.

Cass picked up the can of primer and read the label. It was a nationally known brand. The three cases against the wall were the same product.

"Lots of primer to paint a kitchen," she said.

"Oh yeah," the driver said, stepping close to her. "It was on sale, so I stocked up. I always use primer when I paint, then whatever color the lady of the house wants." He gave her a leering smile. "I always give the lady what she wants."

Disgusted, Cass stepped away. His partner had said they were in a hurry. "How would you feel about unloading all this stuff for us," she asked, "so we can take a nice long look?" That ought to jerk a knot in his tail, she thought.

The man straightened, a look of consternation on his face. "Now look, lady, it's all just painting stuff." The leering expression was gone. "I got a schedule to keep."

He glanced around, there was nobody in sight. He reached into a pocket. "How

about I just hand you this and you let me be on my way. All right?" He held out a folded hundred dollar bill.

Cass was not surprised at the offer of a bribe, but she was surprised at the amount of it; she would have expected it to be no more than a twenty.

"No, thanks," she said. "How about you drive down there," she pointed. "Right now."

"I didn't mean anything, honest..."

"Right now!" Cass slapped the form on his windshield, noting that the helper was now behind the wheel. He drove to the inspection area, his big-mouth partner sitting silently at his side.

Cass got Carter on the intercom. "The big sucker in the van tried to buy me with a C-note. Could be counterfeit."

"I'll check."

Paint and brushes don't make a painter, Cass told herself; there's something wrong with that van. Maybe Carter will find it.

In half an hour Carter called back. "Macho Man has twelve of those hundreds on him. His partner has six. All genuine currency. Everything else seems legit. You want to press a charge of bribery, Cass?"

"Wouldn't stick," Cass answered. "He would just deny it.

But hold on, Carter, I've got to have another look."

She called Sam. "All right if I close down for a few minutes? Got a problem at the garage."

"Go ahead."

She switched the traffic light to red, closed her booth, and started for the inspection garage. From the corner of her eye she saw a Mercury station wagon pulling away from the booth on the end. It was the dog show man, on his way again.

There was nothing she could do now; Riley's men and the Canadian police would follow him. In an hour he could be in Montreal. Or he might be at a dog show, and Cass would have caused a lot of manpower to be wasted.

The paint van stood in one of the bays, flanked by long tables on either side. The van's contents had been placed on the floor and the tables for examination. The driver and his helper stood against a wall some distance away under the watchful eye of a Customs agent.

"We checked the spare tire and the usual places," Carter told her, "and we had one of the dogs in, but he couldn't do much against the paint smell. You think we ought to pull up the floor?"

Cass shook her head. "No, it's something I saw." Her eye fell



on the extension ladder, now leaning against a table.

"That's it," she said to Carter. "There's no step ladder. You don't paint a kitchen without a step ladder. And those brushes; they should be thrown together in a box. And there's no small brush for trim painting."

"So they do sloppy work," said Carter, puzzled. "You got anything else?"

The gallon of primer was on the table. Cass picked it up and looked at it. The lid was clean and smooth; it had not been opened. She looked around, frowning.

The three cases of primer were now on the floor. They had been opened and the overhead lights reflected off the tops of four new gallon cans in each box.

Carter saw Cass staring at the cases of paint. He lifted out one of the cans and handed it to her. "Look," he said, "same label, 'Five Star Sealer Primer,' same thing you've got there."

Cass was holding one can in each hand. Suddenly she looked at Carter, her eyes shining. "Except for one thing," she said.

She handed the cans to Carter. He hefted them slowly. "Yeah," he said, "this can seems a touch lighter."

It was the can from the floor of the van. "Right," Cass said. "Does that tell us anything?"

"That this can is not quite as full as the other one."

"Maybe." A tiny suspicion was growing in her mind. "Only one way to find out. Open it."

Carter hesitated.

"Go ahead, Carter! Open it!"

He spread a piece of canvas on the table and placed each can on it. Carefully he pried off the lid of the lighter can. They bent closer to see the contents. The can was full of smooth white paint.

Now Carter was suspicious. He turned to the second can and opened it. It was also brim full of white paint. He looked at Cass. "Maybe we were wrong."

She shook her head. "Not yet, buddy!" She snatched up a long-bladed screwdriver from a toolbox and stuck it into the paint. With Carter watching she moved it in a circle. The blade stopped against something below the surface of the paint, something solid.

Cass looked at Carter, her eyes wide with excitement. "Bingo," she said softly.

"Bingo," he echoed. He brought a waste can out from under the table. Holding the can with both hands, he carefully poured out the white liquid. The tops of two bricklike shapes emerged from the paint.

Cass lifted one out and Carter swabbed it clean with paper towels. It was a brick of cocaine, carefully sealed in plastic. Carter examined it. "See that little red mark?" he said. "They put that on down in Colombia. This stuff must be as pure as it comes."

He signaled to the agent in charge of the two men. "Arrest them. Possession." As the agent led them away, the driver jerked his arm free and looked at Cass.

"Officer, I guess I never should have come on to you like I did."

Cass detected a note of apology in his voice. She bit back the remarks she might have made to him. "You got that right, junior," she said.

Carter and his crew were busy with the cases of primer. Each of the twelve gallons was found to hold two four-pound bricks of cocaine.

Cass shook her head. "All we've got them on is possession of a controlled substance. We can't make a case of intent to distribute. That big sucker was just an errand boy."

"Don't worry," Carter told her. "To the kingpins down in Florida or wherever, he blew the delivery. It's his fault they lost several million dollars' worth of merchandise. They

won't forget that when he gets out."

Traffic was light when Cass returned to her booth. She hit the intercom for Sam's station. "Any word from Riley and the Mounties?"

"Not yet. Patience, my girl."

"Yes, boss."

An hour passed during which Cass cleared a number of early summer vacationers bound for Ontario and Quebec. She politely explained that she did not supply road maps or recommend accommodations. And she worried. More than enough time had elapsed for Atkins to reach Montreal. Maybe he had actually gone to a dog show. If so, Riley would have a new shaggy dog story to tell the station.

A pickup truck braked to a stop outside the booth, and a voice said, "Shake it up, kid, I haven't got all day."

The driver was a man dressed in a checked flannel shirt and jeans. He wore a mechanic's cap with a John Deere emblem. A second man sat in the passenger seat. The truck was a new model with extra chrome trim and a row of spotlights on the roof. No name on the door. New York plates.

A deer rifle was suspended across the rear window of the cab. A rifle in a truck window

is a common status symbol in northern New York, but it is not to be casually taken across the border.

Cass faced the driver. "Are you planning to take that gun into Canada with you, sir?"

"What do you think?" he answered. "It's my truck and my gun. Sure I am."

"I'm sorry, sir, but it's illegal..."

"Now look, sister," the driver said arrogantly, "this ain't no concealed weapon, and I got my rights!"

This is my day for weirdos, Cass thought. Doggedly she continued. "If you're going on a hunting trip, you have to have a Form CF 4455 in your possession."

The driver shook his head and sneered. "No, I ain't going hunting, 'cept in a few bars." His passenger snickered. "And I ain't got a form whatever."

"I'm sorry, but it's illegal for you to transport that firearm..."

The driver interrupted again. "No prissy-ass girl is going to tell me what to do." His passenger snickered again. "And you better believe it."

Cass stepped out of the booth and walked to the rear of the truck. First rule, be polite, even to redneck bullies. The bed of the truck was empty; no luggage equalled no hunting. She

noted the bumper sticker: THIS VEHICLE INSURED BY SMITH AND WESSON. She went back to the driver's side.

"I'm sorry, sir, but I can't let you proceed with that firearm in your possession. You'll have to..."

"By God, that's about all I'm going to listen to, you—" He added some words Cass had rarely heard. She had had enough. She slammed her fist into the side of the door; the loud bang shocked the man into silence.

"Now, listen, you bone-headed bastard," she said sternly. "You get this crap bucket turned around and the hell out of here before I throw your sorry ass in jail, you hear me?"

The man's mouth hung open. He gulped once. His passenger pulled at his sleeve. "Let's go! Let's go!" he whispered.

"You hear me?" Cass demanded in a loud voice.

"Yes."

"Yes what?" Still louder.

"Yes, ma'am."

"Now, move it!"

The driver put the truck in reverse, cautiously made a U-turn, and was gone.

The intercom, Cass thought suddenly, did I leave the intercom open? Could somebody have heard me?

She spun around to check and almost ran into Director Smith. He and Sam stood on the curb.

Cass sagged against the door frame. "I'm sorry you had to hear that, sir," she said.

The two men glanced at each other. "Hear what?" Smith asked in a mild tone. "I didn't hear anything."

Sam was grinning at her. "We just came to tell you that Atkins, the dog show man, is under arrest. His station wagon was loaded with narcotics. You were right, Cass."

She felt weak with relief. "Thanks," she said. "Thanks."

Director Smith supplied the details. "The surveillance team trailed the subject to a residential area near Mirabel Airport. Several parties were waiting for him in a large garage. They are all now in custody. The man Atkins is smart enough to waive extradition. He's supplying the DEA with details of the operation."

Smith held out his hand. "Congratulations, Inspector Gilbert."

"Thank you, sir."

"One more thing. The subject's vehicle and its contents were confiscated, of course. It appears that the dog was stolen somewhere downstate. Naturally we'll try to locate its owner, but in the meantime we should find a home for it. Do you think you could help us out?"

Queenie was safe; it was what Cass had been hoping to hear. "Yes, sir. No trouble at all. Be glad to."

Smith nodded gravely. He turned and walked back to the administration building. Cass was overjoyed. Queenie would get along just fine with Kelly. Maybe there was an owner still out there and maybe not, but for now Queenie would have a home again.

Sam touched her arm. "The dog is waiting for you over in the garage. Go on over and say hello; I'll take over here for you."

"Thanks, Sam." She turned to go.

"Just a minute, Cass." Sam's tone was serious. "If you want to transfer back to Commercial, I can arrange it."

"Not on your life, boss. I'm beginning to like it here."

# ALFRED HITCHCOCK AND ELLERY QUEEN'S MYSTERY MAGAZINES

## Combo Classified Advertising Order Form



**DELL MAGAZINES**  
attn: Judy Dorman  
Classified Advertising Dept.  
15th Floor  
1540 Broadway  
New York, NY 10036

15 WORDS MINIMUM  
Only \$72.00 for 15 Words or Less.  
\$4.80 Each Additional Word.  
Capitalized Words Add \$.60 per Word.

**SAVE 15% WITH 3 CONSECUTIVE  
MONTHS SAME COPY ORDER**

**DEADLINE:** Copy and payment must be in by the  
5th day of the 4th preceding month for issue in  
which ad is to appear:

PLEASE PRINT OR TYPE

Your Name \_\_\_\_\_

Firm (Name in Ad) \_\_\_\_\_

Address \_\_\_\_\_

City, State, Zip \_\_\_\_\_

Phone \_\_\_\_\_ Date \_\_\_\_\_

Your Signature \_\_\_\_\_

Basic rate \$72.00

Additional words at \$4.80 each. \_\_\_\_\_

Capitalized words at \$.60 each. \_\_\_\_\_

Total amount for 1 ad \$ \_\_\_\_\_

**15% Savings With 3 Consecutive Month Discount**

a. Multiply one ad total \$ \_\_\_\_\_ x 3 = \$ \_\_\_\_\_

b. Multiply total amount on  
above line by x .85 \_\_\_\_\_ x .85 \_\_\_\_\_

c. Total amount for 3 ads \$ \_\_\_\_\_

\$ \_\_\_\_\_ is enclosed for \_\_\_\_\_ insertion(s) in the next available issue(s)

Specify heading \_\_\_\_\_

FOR ADDITIONAL WORDS ATTACH SEPARATE SHEET

(1) \$72.00	(2) \$72.00	(3) \$72.00	(4) \$72.00	(5) \$72.00
(6) \$72.00	(7) \$72.00	(8) \$72.00	(9) \$72.00	(10) \$72.00
(11) \$72.00	(12) \$72.00	(13) \$72.00	(14) \$72.00	(15) \$72.00
(16) \$76.80	(17) \$81.60	(18) \$86.40	(19) \$91.20	(20) \$96.00
(21) \$100.80	(22) \$105.60	(23) \$110.40	(24) \$115.20	(25) \$120.00
(26) \$124.80	(27) \$129.60	(28) \$134.40	(29) \$139.20	(30) \$144.00

HOW DO YOU COUNT WORDS? Name and address must be included in counting the number of words in your ad. Each initial or number counts as 1 word. City and state count as 1 word each. (Garden City, New York, counts as 2 words.) Zip codes are 1 word. (Mark J. Holly, 1540 Broadway, New York, New York 10036 count as 8 words.) Phone numbers are 1 word. Abbreviations such as COD, FOB, P.O. USA, 7x10, 35mm count as 1 word. PO Box 145 counts as 1 word.  
PLEASE MAKE CHECKS PAYABLE TO DELL MAGAZINES.

FICTION

# The Body

Maggie Wagner-Hankins



Illustration by Jason Eckhardt

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG  
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

---

---

**I**t's Friday, eleven ten in the morning, March twenty-second. I'm sitting here thinking about Mary Edna Carver.

She thinks nobody knows. She thinks she's pretty clever. I guess she is, come to think of it. At least she's got all these near-vegetables sitting around here fooled. But I'm not one of them. I have eyes, and I can still use them. Which I *have* been, believe you me!

The question is, do I do anything about it? Knowing it is one thing. Kind of exciting, actually. Gives me something to think about. But do I want to take any action?

What would she do, I wonder, if she knew I knew? Even though we were kind of friends once, that was a ways back, and what with everything that's happened since, she might not remember. Or it might not make any difference to her.

I'm sure she'd be upset. It might even be worth killing someone who knew, just to keep it a secret. I suppose it would because if it got out, there'd be so much publicity it would be like a three-ring circus around here. She could probably even go to jail. So maybe I'd better just keep my yap shut, at least for now.

What I really wonder is, why does she stay here at Shady Meadows? What reason could she possibly have?

But then, maybe if I just use this head the good Lord gave me eighty-one years ago next week, I'll be able to figure it out. Then maybe I can decide whether to tell someone.

It's not like I have any great love for Tiffany McCracken. She was always the meanest aide here. Why they hired her, I don't know, except maybe because she could talk nice and she was so gorgeous they thought it would be good for the morale of the old men here. (Of course they didn't stop to think what it would do to the morale of us women, but isn't that the way it always is?) But the girl has no heart. Like God could only give her one thing, and He decided to give her looks and save the heart for someone else.

So I don't really mind seeing her sitting over there all day, shriveled and silent and helpless in her wheelchair, stuck in Mary Edna's body. Kind of serves her right. But Mary Edna, she's free. She's got that great twenty-two-year-old body now, and all the wisdom of her eighty-some years of living, and you'd think she'd just skip on out of here and find a life.

I could spend a lot of time trying to figure out how she did it, but I'd probably never come up with it because I don't have that sort of background. One way or another, though, someone figured



out a way to do it, and Mary Edna found out about it. It has to be science. God would never get involved in anything like this.

If anyone ever finds these tapes, I hope I'm long gone (unless I've decided to turn them over for evidence). I suppose I could just keep all this inside my head, but since Judith gave me this nifty little tape recorder, and since there's nothing else to use it for (who cares what the menu was or what the weather was like?), I might as well use it to speculate.

Judith. What a dear girl. The sweetest great-grandniece anyone could ever have been blessed with. My only living relative, but I wouldn't trade her for a whole family. If anyone ever deserved to be pretty, it's her. But my, wasn't the Lord stingy when He passed out looks that day. And that limp. Her poor little leg. Still, he wasn't totally heartless. He gave her those eyes. Were any eyes ever that exact shade of green before, or set so perfectly in a face (even if the face is too round, its nose too big, and its mouth too small and thin-lipped)? Maybe the eyes were a last-minute decision because God suddenly realized that on this planet, no matter how sweet and loving and intelligent you are, without something going for you in the looks department, you'll have a hard row to hoe.

But enough about my pixie-eyed angel as I call her. It's nearly time for them to come and wheel me down to lunch. There's not much privacy in a place like this, but if your wits are still sharp, as I like to think mine are, there are ways around that. So I'll turn this off and put it in that hollowed out space in my Bible—the Lord should forgive me, seeing as how I pretty much have the book memorized by now and I have a spare in my trunk—and tuck it back up on the shelf. And no one will be the wiser.

It's nine thirty at night, still March twenty-second. Back to the case, as I'm starting to think of it.

How do I know it's her? How can I be so sure that Mary Edna is now residing in Tiffany McCracken's body, and vice versa?

You'd never know it from looking at Mary Edna's body. She doesn't seem any different. There was a time, maybe two years ago, when I'd have known. That's when we had our short friendship, right after she moved in, when she could still talk and could remember things about her life, or at least make up things about it. But then we had our short falling out, and right after that came her stroke. She didn't talk after that. Didn't really communicate at all.

I have to say, hoping not to sound heartless, that it didn't bother me all that much, her not being able to talk any more, because by then I was starting to get a little tired of hearing Mary Edna talk. Nobody else would listen to her at all, but I did because at least she talked about things besides her operations and her relatives and how many times she'd been to the bathroom that day. True or made up, she had a *life* to talk about.

If you could believe what she said, her father was a scientist and an inventor, her mother was a genius who killed herself because nobody understood her, she lived all over the place before coming to the nursing home, and she'd had about six different careers and four childless marriages, one thing we had in common (the childless part, not the four marriages part).

She said she was psychic, that she had predicted the assassination of John F. Kennedy and the Chernobyl disaster. She also said her grandmother on her mother's side had been a real witch, and that she (Mary Edna, not her grandma) had been born with an extra finger that they'd cut off right after she was born. (There's a little scar on her hand that might or might not back that up.) The strangest thing she told me was that she'd been taken aboard a spaceship when she was forty-three, and that every Tuesday since then, at exactly three thirteen A.M., she received messages from the aliens.

I asked her what sort of messages, but this was one area she was reluctant to talk about. I wonder now if it wasn't some sort of schooling that could have made this body-change thing possible for her.

I know this all sounds crazy. If anyone ever finds this tape, they'll write me off as a senile old lady. But what the heck, I'll probably be dead then, and it won't matter. Besides, I'm willing Judith all my things, so maybe she'll be the only one who'll hear them. Judith, if you're listening, I don't think I'm crazy. By my age, you've seen a lot of things, and nothing seems impossible any more.

But back to the question—how do I know that's not still Tiffany in that cheerleader body? Especially since I hardly see her any more, now that she's been assigned to another wing.

Well, there are a couple of things. Before the stroke, Mary Edna used an expression I'd never heard anyone else use: doggity. Now that's not something you hear every day. It means damn, or something close to that. You know, like, "Doggity, it's hot today!" Or, "Doggity, that hurt!" Well, one day maybe a month ago, I was

wheeling myself down to dinner. I'd gotten tired of waiting for the aide to come get me, and it was a good day for me, strengthwise anyway. So I was on my way to the cafeteria when I saw the Tiffany body (I'll call it that for now) wheeling Ida Shrover just ahead of me. Ida dropped her Kleenex on the floor and made a dive for it. And the Tiffany body said, "Doggity, Ida, just leave it!"

It shocked me, of course, because I hadn't heard that expression in a couple of years. But then I figured she had just picked it up from Mary Edna, the way people adopt other people's expressions. So that by itself didn't convince me.

Then, maybe a week later, I saw the Tiffany body sitting in the break room. She was talking to another aide, Lisa Harmon, a real sweet girl. The Tiffany body was chatting up a storm, friendly as you please. Well, a couple of weeks earlier, I'd heard Tiffany say to another aide that Lisa was a backstabbing so-and-so and that she wouldn't even eat at the same table with her.

I realize people can have a change of heart. But as I said earlier, Tiffany didn't have a heart to change. She was vindictive, and she never forgot anything. One time when I wasn't feeling too well and she snapped at me, I told her she was behaving like a four-year-old. You wouldn't have believed the hateful eyes she turned on me. I have to say I was kind of scared. She said in this real quiet voice, her eyes just like icy spears, "I'd be careful what I said, Elizabeth, because I don't forget things like the rest of you senile old bats around here do." After that, she was never nice to me again. But here she was, talking to Lisa like they were best friends.

I took a good close look to see if maybe she was faking being nice for her own purposes. But I've seen those icy eyes in action, and there didn't seem to be anything there but real friendliness.

So that was another thing. But the real clincher, just the day before yesterday, was this. Some of us were sitting out on the patio after lunch. George Gray ("Georgy Porgy" we'd taken to calling him, because he'd always been such an old lech) was spouting off again about all the women he'd known—in the biblical sense—in his eight decades of life. The Tiffany body was there, not paying much attention, just keeping an eye on things because it was her turn for patio duty. Then he said something about Mary Edna.

I don't think anyone else noticed it, but I'd been studying her anyway, in a wondering sort of way. You should have seen her head snap around when she heard the words "Mary Edna." Like you do when someone says your name.

And she was suddenly so interested. Georgy was going on about the time he'd tried to do Mary Edna a favor by flirting with her and putting his hand on her leg and how ungrateful she'd been, which just proved what a cold fish she was. You should have seen the anger growing in those eyes. And the odd thing was, it wasn't the same anger I'd seen in Tiffany's eyes when she'd given me her warning. It was a totally different look. And there was hurt there, too, which I'd never seen on the Tiffany face before. Her breathing got hard, and the more Georgy talked about Mary Edna, the more she seemed to be trying to control herself.

I was fascinated. Things were starting to fall into place for me—my theory, I mean, about the body change. I waited to see what would happen, but nothing did. At least not just then.

But poor George had a terrible mishap that night in bed. Somehow he got tangled up in his bedsheet, and it strangled him. Next morning when they found him, he didn't have his pajama bottoms on either. There he was, exposed for the whole world to witness. From what went around the place, there wasn't much to see.

So if we suppose that this really has happened—if the personality of Mary Edna has somehow forced its way into the body of Tiffany McCracken—then we have to wonder if the personality of Tiffany is in Mary Edna's body. If not, where is it? There's been no sign from the Mary Edna body to indicate that there's *any* personality in there any more, but the Tiffany personality has to be somewhere. And if it *is* in Mary Edna's body, well, it's only got Mary Edna's body to work with. Which means she could be in there, not able to do a thing because of the stroke and all, until that body goes six feet under. She might even be under the influence of Mary Edna's deteriorating mental condition or whatever you want to call it, and maybe she doesn't even know who she is. Ghastly.

Still, if anyone deserves . . . but no, I'm being mean again.

One question I still have, though, is this. If Mary Edna was able to pull this off, she has to have been able to think pretty clearly these past two years. So what does that mean? That she's been sitting there scrunched up in her wheelchair, acting a lot worse off than she really was? Biding her time, maybe? Working out the details of her plan?

And back to my other question. Why is Mary Edna still hanging around this place when she could be living it up in a hundred other places, working at a dozen other jobs?

But the answer to that might be the easiest of all.

Supposing Mary Edna decided to stick around until she could deal out some revenge to the people here who've gotten on her blacklist over the years? They say revenge is sweet. Maybe, to some people, it's even sweeter than getting a life.

Still, when I look back, Mary Edna didn't have that many problems with people. She was friendly, if a bit overtalkative, and she got along with pretty much everybody. That thing with George would've never happened, I think, if he hadn't been spouting off out there that day and hurt her pride.

But there's *some* reason why she's still here.

And I think it's going to keep me very busy figuring out what it is.

It's Sunday night. Almost two whole days since I've had a chance to talk into this recorder. Things have been in an uproar around here, and the time was never right.

Judith just left, the dear girl. She asked if I was using the tape recorder. I told her I'm recording my memoirs. She smiled and said she hoped I'd let her listen to them sometime.

I'm thinking about taking her into my confidence. I don't want her to think I've gone around the bend, but she's an open-minded girl. She might understand. And she might even be able to help me if there are things I need to find out.

One thing, I wish the Tiffany body would get transferred back to our wing, so I'd have a chance to talk to Mary Edna. Maybe she'd confide in me. I was a friend of hers once.

Well, except for that one little episode. Surely she isn't still holding a grudge about that. I was feeling so bad that day, I can hardly be held accountable for my actions.

We were playing bingo. Teresa Gomez was the activity director back then, before she married that doctor and moved to New York. She was such a patient, cheerful little thing. And she was doing her best, but some of the residents were really trying her patience. They were making her repeat the numbers when they could have heard them the first time if they hadn't been gabbing. I had my card almost filled, and I was in the mood to win for a change, so I was trying to pay attention. And like I said, I wasn't feeling too well.

Mary Edna was sitting right beside me. She was going on about her third husband, and how he'd always loved to cook and brought her breakfast in bed at least three times a week. If I hadn't already heard the story a dozen times it might have been different, but I

really wanted to hear the numbers. Finally, I turned to her and said, "Mary Edna, do you think you could keep your mouth shut for more than five seconds at a time? We're trying to play a game here, and you're jabbering so loud we can't even hear. Do the world a favor and shut up."

Of course I regretted the words as soon as they came out of my mouth. Mary Edna gave me this horrified, hurt look and I was about to apologize, but just then Teresa called B-4, the only one I needed to win. I forgot about Mary Edna and yelled out, "Bingo!" and then I had to go up and collect my prize. (I took a box of notecards to give to Judith.)

After that, the time never seemed right to apologize, and it seemed easier for us both to just pretend it had never happened, so that's what we did. But things were cooler between us. It was maybe a week later that Mary Edna had her stroke.

I wonder if she does still feel some resentment over that. Maybe it wouldn't be such a good idea to confront the Tiffany body just yet, now that I give it some thought.

And maybe I should be glad she's not still on my wing.

On to other things. I can't totally occupy my time pondering this Mary Edna business. As I said when I started, things have been in an uproar over the weekend.

Yesterday morning there was a cat running loose in the home. It was a nice enough cat, one of those friendly-looking orange ones. We're not supposed to have animals in here, but it was such fun that nobody was going to point it out. We residents took turns hiding it in our rooms. As soon as I got wind of it, I offered to shelter the poor little thing, too. Being one of the more self-sufficient residents here, I don't attract a lot of attention.

So Jessie Parker sneaked it to my room in her newspaper, of all things. I kept it for a couple of hours, played with it, watched it. It reminded me of a cat I had when my husband was still alive.

That was last evening. When it came time for supper, I promised the cat I'd bring it back something to eat. But when I got back to my room, it was gone. I figured one of the aides had been in, found it, and taken it without making a fuss. They all like me. They wouldn't have said anything to get me in trouble.

This morning, Ruth Harrison was all swelled up and red and splotchy, and they had to rush her to the emergency room.

It turned out that the cat was under her bed all night, and she's deathly allergic to cats. The *reason*, sad to say, that it was under

her bed was that, well, the poor thing was dead. The housekeeper found it today when she was cleaning, after they'd taken Ruth to the hospital.

Ruth swears up and down she doesn't know how it got in. And of course she wouldn't. I mean, why would she take a cat in when she knows she's allergic to them?

Nobody has figured out yet what killed the cat. The hot gossip is that the cat was diseased when it came into the home—on death's doorstep practically—and it was running around the nursing home all day yesterday spreading whatever disease it had. All of us who had hidden or played with the cat were a little nervous, wondering if we'd picked up something. But we were examined this afternoon, and everyone (except Ruth, of course) was given a clean bill of health.

Poor Ruth. I saw her a little while ago, and she still looks awful. We figure the cat went into her room when no one was looking and slunk under the bed and died, and that it was just rotten luck that he picked her room to die in.

But now that I think about it, Ruth is the one woman here that Mary Edna couldn't stand because Ruth is always boasting about something. Her perfect skin or her perfect teeth (all still in her mouth) or her perfect bone structure, inherited from her Scandinavian parents. She is the prettiest of us women here, and she knows it. Until today, that is. I shouldn't laugh. I really shouldn't.

I wonder if Mary Edna is laughing.

It's later. There was a knock at my door while I was recording, and I almost didn't get this shoved under my magazine quick enough.

It was Louise Hopper. Ruth just went into convulsions, and she's dead. She died before they could even get her into the ambulance.

I'm too upset, really, to talk into this thing much more tonight, so I'm going to put it up. But you can bet I'll be doing some real thinking. If this turns out to be what I think it is, our friend Mary Edna has gone just a little too far. Maybe she didn't mean to. How could she know the reaction would prove fatal? Then again, maybe she did. Maybe all this new power is going to her head.

I wonder if it'll reach a point where I'll be forced to say something. As much as I try to keep my nose out of other people's affairs, I do have some sense of responsibility, and as possibly the only person who knows the truth of what's going on, I probably owe it



to everyone to do the right thing.

But if I do, will Mary Edna turn on me, too?

And who will believe me if I do tell the truth? If no one does (which is likely), I'll be a sitting duck for Mary Edna.

I did it. It's Tuesday night, late, and I can't sleep. I can hardly think.

After what happened to Ruth and Georgy, I decided I had to do something, even if I put myself at risk.

First I went to the Mary Edna body, thinking it might be the safest place to start.

I sat down beside her and pretended to rub her back because we all kind of do that sort of thing, hoping we might get a response.

"Tiffany?" I whispered. "You in there?" Good Lord, if anyone had heard me, they'd've thought I was loony. But no one did. I don't think the Mary Edna body heard, either. There wasn't so much as a wiggle of her little finger. Her expression didn't change an iota.

So I really don't know that Tiffany's in there. Not like I know Mary Edna's in the other body. And boy, do I know that now. Which brings me to the more exciting part of my story.

I waited till after supper to talk to her. I had the guts to wheel myself down to the lounge the aides use. I knocked at the door, hoping Tiffany was on the late shift because I hadn't seen much of her lately and didn't know what her schedule was.

She was inside along with a couple of others, so I very nicely asked if she could come out and have a little visit with me. Well, of course, everyone looked surprised, especially the Tiffany body. But she came out. I'm not sure if it was my imagination or not, but she looked a little nervous. More ammunition, I thought, because the real Tiffany had never looked nervous about anything. She could have been caught blowing up a bank and she would have just looked irritated at being caught.

She stepped out and asked if I wanted her to wheel me somewhere. I said, yes, let's go down to the activity room; it was empty then.

When we got inside, she wheeled me to a table and sat down across from me. "What's on your mind?" she asked.

"I just thought it had been awhile since we'd had a visit," I said. I knew I could trap her if I said something that only Tiffany would know the truth about. So I searched my mind while her eyes studied my face.

"You know, Tiffany," I said, "I was wondering whatever happened about that young man you were dating. What was his name? Jason? Jeremy? Something with a J?"

She looked confused for only a minute, then said, cool as you please, "I date a lot of boys. I've dated a Jason *and* a Jeremy lately. What do you mean, what happened about him?"

"Well, I thought there was talk of marrying—"

"Marrying!" she said with a laugh, and for an instant I thought maybe I'd made a real bad mistake because it sounded just like the Tiffany laugh. "I'm not getting married, at least not for ages. There are too many guys out there waiting to get a date with me." She laughed again, but I suddenly saw the tiniest pinprick of worry in her eyes.

"That's nice," I said. "You know, Mary Edna used to—" I studied her closely to see how she reacted to the name. She kind of perked up, but maybe no more than usual. She might have been practicing not responding to her real name. "Mary Edna used to think the world of you. Do you know that? She told me once that of all the aides in the place you were her favorite. She said you were really pretty and you deserved to be because you were so sweet—" At first I saw amazement in her eyes. But that would be expected from Tiffany. I mean, she had to know she was a bitch. She must know I was lying to her. If it *was* Tiffany.

But my money was still on Mary Edna's being in that body. And the truth was, Mary Edna couldn't stand Tiffany. So I kept at it.

"Really?" she asked. "Funny, she never seemed to be all that crazy about me."

"Oh, she didn't want to make the other aides jealous, but believe me, you were her favorite. Still would be, I imagine, except she can't really—well—you know her condition."

She eyed me warily then. "Why are you telling me this?"

"I just thought you might like to know. Sometimes people take time to complain, but they forget to say the *nice* things they're thinking."

"Well, I—still find it hard to believe, but if you say so, well—"

"Oh yes. She used to go on and on about you." I could see something like anger building in her, and for a minute I was all too aware that I was sitting practically helpless in my wheelchair, alone in a room with a person who looked like an ad for a fitness club. But I had to know.

"Maybe it's time to get you back," she said icily.

I wasn't ready to go back. I had one more card to play. "Tiffany, I . . . probably shouldn't be telling you this now. I mean, it's not really up to me. You should find out about it when the time's right. But I feel you might get a lift from knowing just how much Mary Edna *did* care about you. So I don't suppose it'll do any harm to let you know that Mary Edna has remembered you in her will. She has quite a little nest egg, and she said it seemed a shame to see a beautiful girl like you struggling on the tiny salary they pay at places like—"

I didn't even get my sentence finished.

"You lying piece of work!" she shot at me, and practically lunged across the table at me. "How dare you!"

I was about to holler for some help before I went the way of Georgy and Ruth, but instead I yelled, "Mary Edna, don't do it!"

She froze. We both froze. It seemed like a long time, but it probably wasn't thirty seconds. Then she said, "What did you say?"

I said as earnestly as I could, "Nothing. Nothing at all. I'm sorry I upset you."

"I'd watch what I was saying," she said to me. Without asking, she silently wheeled me back to my room.

And here I am. I'd bet a million dollars that Mary Edna is not only in the Tiffany body, but knows I know it.

We don't have locks on our doors. I've moved my chair over in front of the door and tucked the back of it under the doorknob like they do in the movies. I hope it keeps her out. I think what I've done, to satisfy my curiosity, was a very dumb thing.

Judith just left. It's the afternoon after my fiasco with Mary Edna in the activities room.

I think Judith thinks I've lost my mind. I spilled the whole thing to her, and bless her heart, she tried to keep from laughing and from crying (I think she couldn't decide which was more appropriate), but when I told her why she had to get me out of here and help me find another place to live, she looked shocked. Of course she said she'd see what she could do, but I know what she's doing. She's giving me some time to work myself out of this. She probably thinks it's just temporary paranoia. Or maybe she's going to tell the doctors about it.

Just great.

Judith, if you're listening to this tape, I'm not holding it against you. I don't know anybody kinder in the world than you, and if

anyone could believe me, or would try to, it would be you. So it must be that the whole thing is just so ridiculous that no one would be able to buy it. Please don't think I'm upset with you. Frustrated is more like it.

Back to the business at hand. There are two things I have to do now.

One, stay alive.

And two, find some way to prove to someone what I know.

Maybe I can get Mary Edna to confide in me. Surely that's a terrible secret to have to carry on your own. Maybe it would be a relief to her for someone to know, if that someone wasn't judging her. Maybe . . . oh, that's probably too much to hope for, but maybe she would even tell me how she did it.

Anyway, I guess that's the best option I have to accomplish number one, staying alive. As for number two, if she does tell me, I'll have to promise not to tell anyone. And I'm known for sticking to my promises. So I wouldn't tell anyone.

Oh, how did I ever manage to get mixed up in all this?

Speak of the devil. I had no more than recorded my last sentence a few hours ago when who should come knocking on my door but the Tiffany body. I almost didn't know what to do, but I figured you never accomplish anything by being a coward. So I quickly hid the recorder and let her in. At least she was nice enough to knock.

Since I'm talking, it's obvious I'm not dead. But as for what the future holds, I'm not real sure.

I did what I said I was going to do, though.

The Tiffany body said she had come to learn more about Mary Edna and what I knew about the will. That kind of threw me. For a split second I wondered if I'd done something crazy in telling her that. I mean, what if, by some slim chance, I'm wrong? What if Tiffany is still in the Tiffany body, and now she thinks that the minute Mary Edna goes to her Maker she's going to get some money? What if she . . .

It's too horrible to think of. Except I *know* I'm not wrong.

I tried to edge out of it by saying something like, "You know, Tiffany, if you had a little secret, something that was really bothering you—something you couldn't tell another soul—you could trust *me* with it."

"Oh yeah," she said suddenly. "Like Mary Edna could trust you with her secret about her will?"

Well, she had me there. Even though we both knew it wasn't true, it sure didn't make me look very trustworthy.

So my next tactic was to tell the Tiffany body about what Mary Edna had told me about alien beings being in contact with her. I said I thought it was fascinating and wondered if they might not be able to help her do some really unusual things with their powers. I even went so far as to suggest they might be able to help people trade bodies.

You couldn't get much clearer than that, could you?

She didn't take the bait, but when she left, I reminded her that she could always talk to me. That I was her friend.

So tonight I'm going to sleep with my chair under my doorknob again, but maybe I've made some progress. She just needs time to think about it. Surely she'll see that everyone needs a confidante.

Mary Edna Carver is dead. She died in her sleep last night, and this morning I feel frightened and stunned.

I don't mean Mary Edna, of course. I mean the Mary Edna body. Or maybe I do mean Mary Edna.

Oh, I just don't know what to think! Because I have no idea what happened to their souls, or whatever you want to call them, at the moment of death. Is there some law that when a body dies, all souls that have been hopping around have to go back to their proper bodies?

I wish I knew who had died.

One thing is sure, everyone is saying Mary Edna's death was from natural causes. No sign of foul play.

Not that that means anything, really. I mean, there are plenty of ways of killing someone old and making it look natural, as long as no one is suspicious enough to request an autopsy.

I'm going to have to keep a real close eye on the Tiffany body for awhile till I figure out who's in there. She's hanging around for now, but maybe she's given her notice and will be out of here soon.

If that's the case, I guess my part in this big mystery is over. As long as she doesn't try to tie up loose ends by finishing me off, I'll just be able to chalk this up as the biggest mystery of my life. But at this point, it's kind of a big if.

I guess if I died right now, so close to the others and while I'm still so healthy, it would look suspicious and someone might start an inquiry. Maybe even Judith would have reason to rethink things. So that will probably keep me safe, unless Mary Edna just

doesn't care whether anyone finds out because she's planning to take off for the Bahamas or something. Except, of course, that even though she's in Tiffany's body, it's not like she has any money—

Hey, I just happened to think. What if . . . yes, I suppose that could have happened. Mary Edna really could have willed everything to Tiffany. Which, of course, would be willing everything to herself. Maybe she'd already thought of that, or maybe I gave her the idea the other night. So maybe she *will* have some money.

I imagine it would be pretty hard killing your own body, no matter how nice your new one was or how bad a shape your old one was in. I mean, creeping in there, maybe, and what? Holding a pillow over the face? Oh, it's too ghastly even to think about for too long.

Well, it'll be interesting to see if "Tiffany" inherits all Mary Edna's money. But why wouldn't she? Surely Mary Edna was bright enough to foresee this possibility and to plan for it.

I'm going to keep a close eye on the Tiffany body today during bingo. She's scheduled to be in there helping. If she seems truly devastated, I'll know she didn't think to will herself her own money. If she seems happy, I'll know she did. And if she seems completely unaffected, either she's a great actress, or I've been wrong about the whole thing.

Judith switched off the tape recorder and shifted her gaze vacantly to the living room window of her tiny apartment. Beyond the window, traffic noises attested to life going busily on, but inside, the echoes of her great-aunt's words hung like mist in the air. Time had stopped.

"Well," she whispered into empty space, "I believe you now."

She had listened to the tapes three times in the past twenty-four hours. Three times she had switched the recorder off, wishing she could turn back time, go back to the day in the nursing home when her aunt had tried to convince her of what was going on. Wishing she had a second chance to believe a woman who had never lied to her in her life.

How could things have turned out so horribly? She looked blankly at the drapes, the flowers on the table, her hands holding the tape recorder. It was as if her hands, like the machine, the drapes, the flowers, were separate from her.

Her mind kept seeing how it must have been—her aunt tumbling down the short staircase, probably terrified, her worst fears real-

ized. She squinted and shook her head to remove the picture. It receded for a while. She knew it would be back. Along with everything else.

Her body was numb—the tranquilizers?—but her mind . . . what could calm that anguished, racing machine that was about the only thing she could feel and recognize as a living part of herself? It was almost impossible to believe her life could go on from here.

And yet it had to. Of course it had to. People were depending on her. The patients at the hospital where she worked. The kids in the neighborhood who took sewing lessons from her, who expected her to watch the little plays they wrote and listen to their problems.

Her gaze went again to the letter on the table. The letter from Mary Edna Carver. Each time she had picked it up to read it, it had seemed heavier and heavier. Now it had taken on such momentous proportions she wasn't sure she could even lift it.

She smiled, a wry, cynical twist of the lips. Mary Edna's letter and her auntie's tapes made the kind of story only the tabloids would publish. And yet here she sat, a sane, intelligent woman, knowing it was all true. The murders that had taken place. The body switching. All of it.

Just once more, she thought. I have to read it just once more. Then maybe I'll burn it.

She was surprised at how light the letter felt this time. Yes, she would certainly burn it. Then it would be lighter still. Ash, floating in the air, its message dissipated by wind currents. Her eyes took in the words slowly so her brain could also take them in.

*Dear Judith,*

*I feel I know you, your aunt spoke so often of you at the home, and with so much love and admiration. No matter what has passed between your aunt and me, I know you to be a wonderful young lady with a good heart and a lot of intelligence. I also hope your makeup includes forgiveness and compassion, and I'm sure it must, though perhaps not for me. That would take those properties in larger measure than even the best-hearted people possess.*

*But I feel I must try to explain things to you, if for nothing more than your peace of mind. I have included with this letter some tapes your aunt made. I found them in her room, which was what precipitated my actions against her. You would have received them sooner or later, but I prefer you have them now, to help me explain. You must be terribly confused. So listen to the tapes, with the knowl-*



*edge that everything that matters in them is true. Then return to this letter.*

Judith turned to the next page. No need to hear her aunt's pitiful fears played out again.

*So now you know the truth about me. But it's not the most terrible truth. No, even worse than possessing the body of a young woman who, despite her personality flaws, had a life ahead of her in which she might have mended them, and then letting her die (yes, by natural causes) in my own withered body; even worse than taking petty vengeance on a few old folks who rubbed me the wrong way; even worse than these things was that I am responsible for what happened to your aunt. I let my fear run away with me—the fear that she would tell someone and they would believe, and my life would be over. Pushing her down the stairs seemed at the time my only choice. I wish now that, by some miracle, she might have twisted free and sent me flying down them instead. But we can't change the past.*

*Odd, but the very thing I feared most, that my life would end, is now the thing I welcome most, so when you read this, I will be no more. Except my soul, which I expect will wind up in the fieriest pits of hell unless there is a mercy in God that includes the most heinous of sinners.*

*I hope you will accept what I have to give you now. Perhaps you think it is a frivolous gift, since people of your caliber don't place so high an importance on physical appearance as more common people do. I'm not, of course, referring to the money I've left you, which is my whole estate, by the way. I'm talking about the body. The body you wound up in yesterday, which must have frightened you beyond belief. I realize looks aren't everything, and I don't mean to be rude, but you know, my dear, for all your wonderful personality, you deserved to be prettier and to have a strong body you could do things with like dance and run and ice skate and climb mountains, if you so desired. So that was my final gift to you. It can't make up for what I've done, but since I've decided I no longer want to live, it seemed a shame for this perfect, healthy body that was Tiffany's to be left to rot in a cold grave.*

*I cannot tell you how I am able to do this. Let me just say that I am, and I know of no one else who is. I learned it from a group of beings I spoke with your aunt about on several occasions. I don't*

*know whether she ever believed me. I had the annoying habit of talking her ear off, and I suppose I did exaggerate from time to time. But that's not important now.*

*What is important, to me, is that I have this body to give you. I will take your poor, crippled one, and I will find a dignified way to end my life so your body won't suffer any more ravages. It will look like an accident so no one can accuse you of taking the coward's way out that I have chosen for myself. Please take the money I am leaving you and start a new life. Tiffany McCracken, because of her spoiled personality, had few friends. She had no family. I chose her carefully for my own purposes so I could go away and no one would wonder what had happened to me/her. Now you are free to do the same.*

*I am sorry. So very sorry. Maybe someday you can forgive me.*

*Mary Edna Carver*

The old nausea rose in her throat just as it had every time she'd read the letter. Her body. Her precious body. Even with all its flaws, it was the body she had grown up in. The body her mother had cuddled in its youth, the body her young patients at the hospital had hugged and felt secure with. The body she had dressed and bathed and slept in thousands of times.

One minute she had been standing at her bathroom mirror, brushing her teeth. The next, she was at the 7-Eleven on the corner, panicking because she couldn't understand how she had gotten there. A dream, she assured herself. I'm dreaming. And had raced home anyway because even in a dream, where else would she logically go from the 7-Eleven?

Her front door had been locked, and she'd had to dig up the spare key from under the rosebush.

When she let herself in, she found the back door standing wide open, as if someone had hurried out. In the bathroom, her toothbrush was lying on the floor, not even rinsed of toothpaste.

And then she had looked in the mirror. Someone else's face stared back at her. No doubt about it now. A dream.

And then she had seen the package with the big, black writing on it: DON'T BE AFRAID, JUDITH. READ THIS RIGHT AWAY.

That had been yesterday. Too long to be a dream.

The body still felt loose on her. It was too easy to walk. Too easy to sit and twirl around and race to pick up the phone, thinking it might be the hospital. . . .

She had wanted to find her body, the one Mary Edna had taken from her and planned to let die when she killed herself. But where did a person look in a situation like that?

She wondered whether she would feel it—know it somehow—when Mary Edna killed her body. Or would she never know when or whether it had happened? What if Mary Edna changed her mind? Would she run into herself at the grocery store? It was a macabre thought, and she almost smiled.

The worst part had been trying to visit Aunt Elizabeth in the hospital. She had pleaded, but they wouldn't let her in. Relatives only in the ICU. They knew her aunt's only living relative was Judith because Judith had told them that herself when Aunt Elizabeth had been rushed to the hospital and admitted. So there was no way, even in disguise, that she could pass for herself now.

Maybe it was for the best, she thought angrily. Even though her aunt was in a coma, what if she should come out of it and find this strange body standing over her—the body that had housed her enemy, the body that had pushed her down the flight of stairs to the laundry room? Would she be terrified? Would Judith be able to convince her quickly enough that now the body belonged to someone who loved her?

And so all she could do was wait by the phone for the call that would tell her her aunt was out of danger or . . . no, she wouldn't think of the other possibility. She wondered at times if the people at the hospital thought her callous for never visiting. She was at least grateful it wasn't the hospital where she worked. Or *had* worked. She could never go back to St. Mary's as Judith Langston.

There was a sharp rapping at her door, and she jerked awake like someone slapped out of a nightmare.

Her mind was a jumble of questions. Do I answer it? What if it's someone who knows me? What do I tell them? That I'm a visiting cousin? A friend? That Judith moved and left no forwarding address and I'm the new tenant here?

Maybe I won't answer it at all.

"Judith? Please open the door!"

She recognized the voice.

Her own voice.

So Mary Edna had not killed her body yet! There was still time to switch back!

She almost knocked the chair over in her race to the door. Jerking it open, she was torn between love for the familiar body and

hatred for the woman possessing it. All she could do for a few seconds was stare, her fingers yearning to reach out and close around the throat, restrained by the hope that soon it would be her own throat again.

By sheer willpower, she kept her voice even. "Well, I see you haven't killed yourself, have you? You still love life a little, no matter how evil you've become. I want so much to hurt you right now." Her fingers stayed clenched in fists at her side. "But I'm prepared to cut you a deal. You change us back right now, and I swear I'll burn the tapes and the letter and no one will ever hear a whisper about . . . all of this."

Her own green eyes stared back almost blankly.

"Please," Judith went on. "I have to see her. My aunt is . . . she may be dying. They won't let me in." Her calm was beginning to crumble. She was surprised, in some dark recess of her mind, that it wasn't anger she felt now, but pain, pain that had her pleading. "Please, I have to go to her!"

"You won't find her there," the Judith body said, and reached out.

You can't mean that! she wanted to scream. But no words came. It was clear what she meant. Everything seemed to drain out of her now. Even the pain. She was a shell. And not even *her* shell. She hadn't even that now to call her own.

Then something in the woman's expression caught her attention, pulled her back up through the floorboards so she could listen to the words.

With tenderness Judith recognized in spite of the impossibility, the woman held out her arms and said, "Oh, my dear, sweet little pixie-eyed angel. What a lot you've been through. What a lot we both have. But dry your tears. I think things are going to be all right now."

Later, after they had decided on the funeral arrangements for Elizabeth's body, they talked about what they should do. It appeared that, beyond moving away and starting over, there was nothing at all they *could* do.

"Mary Edna took the secret of this body switching to the grave," her aunt said. "To *my* grave, I might add. Who'd've guessed?"

Judith sipped cold coffee. "I was so sure she was going to kill herself in my body. She said in the letter—"

"She wasn't thinking. She only wanted out. Out of the mess. But she came to see me, to beg my forgiveness. And what do you sup-

pose? She hadn't been in the room two minutes before I went into cardiac arrest. I guess she saw it as one last chance to try to make amends. So now, here we are, two young women with new bodies to get used to and a whale of a story to tell someone someday."

It had grown dark. Already Judith was visualizing the little apartment without the familiar paintings on the walls, without the things that had made it a home for the past three years.

They had decided on Phoenix. They had visited it five years earlier, right before Aunt Elizabeth had gone into the nursing home. She had always wanted to see it and was afraid she might never get another chance.

On the last day of their stay, they had stood together, twenty stories above Phoenix, looking out their hotel room window. Her aunt, with a heart so full it had spilled tears down her cheeks, had said, "It's like no other place on earth, Judith. A magic land. It seems . . . old and young at the same time. I tell you, my pixie-eyed angel, if I had it to do over again . . ."

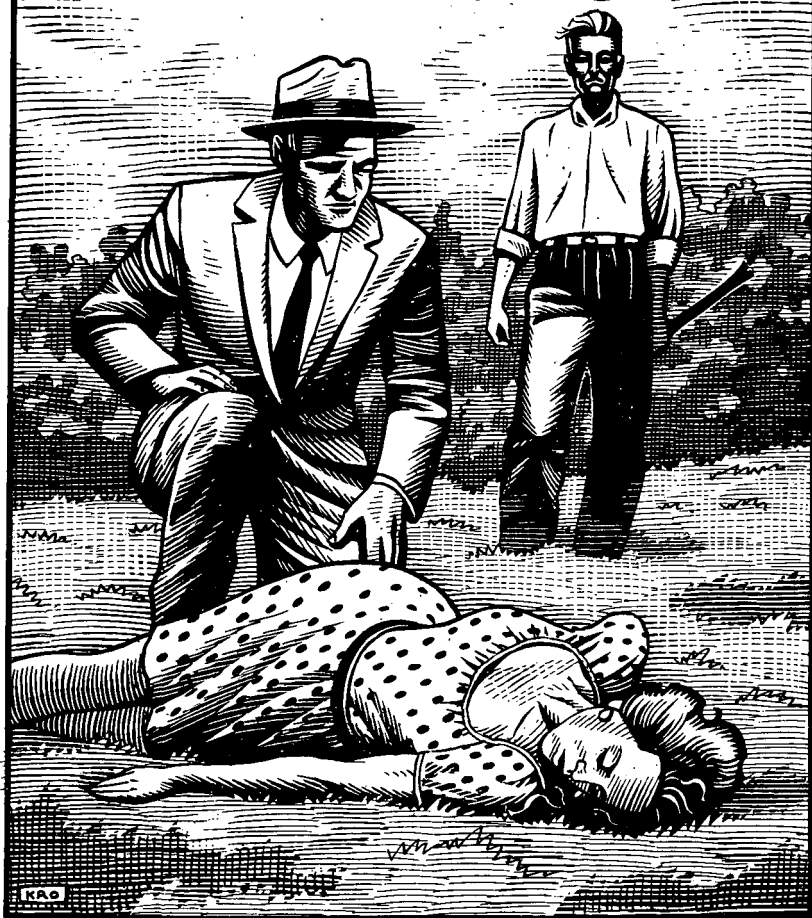
*Old and young at the same time.* The minute Judith had reminded Elizabeth of those words, there was no question of where two young women with much to get used to should start over.

Aunt Elizabeth had fallen asleep on the sofa. Judith got up and put a comforter over her, out of habit, though her aunt's body was no longer frail. Then, smiling, she began taking her paintings off the walls.

MYSTERY CLASSIC

# The Murderer

Joel Townsley Rogers



LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG

**J**ohn Bantreagh backed away from her a step on caving knees, with his gaze still on her. She looked so helpless, and somehow innocent, lying here on the meadow grass in the gray, still dawn, in front of his farm truck wheels. In her white dress with its big red polka dots and red patent leather belt, and her white shoes with their red heels. With her red mouth and light brown curly hair, and her hazel eyes open.

Looking at him, it seemed like, out of dream-filled sleep, a little blankly. As she did sometimes in the early mornings while she dressed quietly to go out and do the chores, with her eyes wide open, though not yet all awake. But, of course, she wasn't. There was an opaqueness on her lenses, there was a cold dew on her face, and she was dead.

One wheel had gone over her throat and the other over her sheer-clad ankles. Her legs had hardly been hurt at all, he thought; the ground was soft, and they had just been pressed down into the mire and grass roots. Only her throat had been broken—the trachea, the larynx, and pharynx, or whatever else there was in people's throats that made them live and breathe. That made them talk, too. Her eyes were on him, with that look they had. But she would never say who had done it.

John Bantreagh felt as if his own throat had been crushed as he tried to pull his gaze away, with his knees caving. As if a heavy wheel had rolled onto it, and—not like with her—had not backed away. He looked around him slowly with his reddened gaze. He had a feeling that other eyes were watching him, if not hers. But it was a lonely meadow, on a lonely road. Just dark pine woods around, and the dirt road two or three hundred yards away, beyond the tumbledown snake fence that bordered it.

His truck motor had died. He must start it and back down across the meadow to the road again. Get on back home before anyone was stirring. Let her be found by someone else. It would be hours, way off here—it might be even days. That would be too much to endure, knowing she was here. This evening, if no one had found her before then, he might suggest, just offhandedly, looking along here, as if it were something that had occurred to him without any reason. There was just so much a man could stand.

The air had lightened from dark silver to pearl. It was not full light yet, but it was no longer night. He had never known a moment so quiet and still. Across the meadow grass he could see the tracks of his truck coming in at a diagonal from the road, through the



break in the fence, where the weeds were crushed down that grew in the shallow roadside ditch and along the field side of the fence. Two parallel lines, with only moderate waves in them, coming directly to where his truck stood now with its front tires almost touching her. Smooth-worn front tires, but cleated rear tires, which had left their tracks of broad, deep, transverse ridges. They were a pair he had ordered from the mail order catalogue and had cost a lot of money. He had got them from the freight office only yesterday morning, along with the things for Mollie and the kids and the rest of the order; and had put them on when he got back home, with her and the kids watching him.

Just yesterday forenoon. Mollie had been rinsing out some things on the back porch bench beside the pump, with her wrists buried in the wash-basin, and soapy water splashing on the ground off the porch edge. She had paused to brush back her tendrils of damp hair with the inside of her elbow, squeezing out a handful of sand-colored fabric.

"You're proud of those tires, aren't you, John?"

"Sure am!" he told her as he knelt on the gravel unwrapping one of them. "I'll bet nobody else has anything like them in the whole county. Eight-ply, tractor tread, guaranteed for fifty thousand miles. Could have got a good-enough tire for six fifty less apiece, maybe. But it's smart to get something that lasts, as I can see it."

"I reckon you're pretty smart, John."

"Sure am, honey. I got you."

"How long do you figure I'm guaranteed for?"

"Till death do us part," he had replied, grinning.

She had laid the sand-colored fabric down on the bench and had squeezed out a handful of something black—her dark blue blouse, it must be, that looked black because it was wet. She didn't have any black things. She didn't seem altogether pleased. The tires had cost a lot of money. Maybe she was thinking of the nice things it could have bought.

"What are you washing out, honey?" he had asked her.

"Just my rayon stockings and some old things."

"Maybe someday you'll have a pair of nylons so you won't have to take such care of those rayons. I saw Lilybelle wearing a pair the other day. I wouldn't know, but she said they were. I guess every woman likes them."

"Does Lilybelle have nylon underwear, too?"

She liked to tease him at times about Lilybelle. It was just a joke. She wasn't really jealous of Lilybelle. She hadn't any reason to be that he knew of.

"She didn't say, honey," he told her.

She had said something else then, brushing back her hair again, but he hadn't heard, having begun to pry one of the old bare-tread shoes off a rim with a mallet and tire iron. The kids had been jumping around and yelling, and she might have been reprimanding them. Vaguely, in the back of his mind, he wondered who would take care of the kids now. It was the first time he had thought of it.

His knees caved and caved. He had heard of men's knees doing that, but it didn't seem natural. He couldn't control them, though. He stiffened them, and they jerked down again as if they were only water. He planted a hand on the mudguard of his truck, taking a dragging step back toward the seat. He must start his engine and back down to the road and go on home. Now.

There was no sound of distant barnyard roosters. It must be a good mile at least, maybe two or five, to the nearest house. If there was any wildlife in the woods around the meadow—fox, bobcat, or possum—it was keeping very still.

A car was coming along the road already, though. A sedan with some early driver at the wheel. It slowed its bumping progress as it approached the break in the fence. It came to a momentary halt. The driver had seen the truck and him in the meadow, John Bantreagh thought, standing motionless. Maybe he could see the white of her dress in front of his wheels, though the truck might hide that from the road.

The car turned and came in, anyway. It drove slowly along the broad, deep, cleated tracks of his truck, approaching. That it should take the same course was perhaps inevitable, or at least expectable. Every field, however smooth, has its own hidden soft spots, waves, and hummocks, and one car will tend to follow the same path across it as another, unless deliberately held to a different course. Particularly when a previous car has already made ruts at the grass roots. The driver of the approaching sedan probably didn't realize that he was flattening out those cleated and distinctive treads beneath the impress of whatever nondescript tire treads he might have himself. Perhaps he didn't notice them. Or if he did, he considered their preservation of no importance.

It wasn't important, of course, thought John Bantreagh. His truck was here, and he was here. He rested the palm of his left

hand on the mudguard. His eyes burned red and sleepless. His throat was dry. His right hand hung down at his side with something in it. His truck crank, he realized. He didn't know how long he had had it in his hand. He had been quite unaware of it. He hadn't the strength now to place it back on the truck floor where he usually kept it. Not even to open his hand and let it drop into the grass.

The driver of the sedan stopped with his bumper nudging the back of the truck. He opened the door and got out. He was a big young fellow with a bronzed, square-jawed face and alert and steady gray eyes. He wore a black tropical suit, unbuttoned on an expanse of soft white shirt, black-necktied, and a black slouch hat. He overtopped John Bantreagh by four inches. His lithe, light-stepping frame had the massed weight of two hundred pounds. He was a dozen years younger than John Bantreagh—perhaps he was twenty-five. He looked fresh and well slept and newly bathed, competent and cool.

He pushed back his hat on his crisp black curls. He wore a nick-eled badge, pinned to a red suspender strap over his white shirt. There was a polished walnut gun butt protruding from a black holster on his right hip, and a pair of handcuffs hanging beside it from his belt.

He gave a brief, alert glance at John Bantreagh's stained, red-eyed face and thin, shaking form. He stood looking down at the woman's body lying supine in front of the truck wheels, with his fists planted on his hips and his pectoral muscles expanded.

"What happened?" he said. "Run over?"

John Bantreagh swallowed. "Yes."

"It looks pretty much like it was deliberate," the big young fellow said quietly.

He squatted beside her, looking, not touching. With steady, alert eyes. With his alert and sleep-refreshed brain behind them.

"Name's Clade," he said. "Roy Clade, deppity, from over in Boomerburg. I was due at the courthouse this morning on a car-stealing case, and just happened to take the back road, first time in a year. Never thought I'd run into anything like this."

"No," John Bantreagh swallowed. "I reckon nobody would."

"Yes, she was murdered," the young deputy said quietly. "No two ways about it. Blood on the back of her head, matted with her hair. She was hit with a tire iron or something, and then laid on the

ground when she was out cold, and the front wheels run up onto her. Know who she is?"

"Yes," John Bantreagh swallowed. "Her name's—her name was Mollie Bantreagh—Mrs. John Bantreagh—from over outside of Jeffersonville. Funny name, sounds like 'pantry,'" he said tonelessly—as he always did, to forestall banal remarks about it. "I don't know where it came from. Some say it's an aristocratic name in Scotland, but I don't know. She's—she was my wife."

"Your wife!" The young deputy shot up a quick, keen look at him. "You mean you were her husband?"

"Yes," John Bantreagh said. "That's right." He could not stop the wobbling of his knees. The dryness stuck in his throat. He rubbed his Adam's apple with his left hand to relieve the pressure on it.

"Tough!" said the young deputy, in a voice of proper sympathetic pitch. "Your wife! Gee! I thought you were just some stranger driving by. I'm not a married man myself. But your wife—she must have meant an awful lot to you. I'll bet this has hit you terribly."

"Yes," said John Bantreagh, feeling his throat. "We had our little disagreements at times, like everybody. I reckon the neighbors know. She always liked nice things a lot."

"All married people have their little battles, I expect," said the young deputy awkwardly. "It'd be kind of funny if they didn't. Gee, your wife, though! Kids, I suppose, too?"

"Three," said John Bantreagh. "Three. Two boys and a girl."

"And no one to look after them now, I reckon. Tough!" the young deputy said again, with an effort at feeling. "It sure is an awful break for you, Mr. Bantreagh. Who could have done a thing like this, anyway?"

"I—" said John Bantreagh, swallowing, "I thought maybe I could get Lilybelle to look after them for a spell. She's not very fond of kids, I don't think, but she might do it for me."

"Who's Lilybelle?"

"Lilybelle Turner, lives next place down the road," said John Bantreagh, rubbing his throat. "She's only a kid herself, just nineteen, and not seeming hardly that old, with her dark curls and blue eyes. All she can think of is having a good time and loving. Mollie—Mollie used to pretend to be kind of jealous of her, just joking. But she's a woman, anyway, and I reckon I can get her to pitch in and help with the kids, if the neighbors don't talk."

"There's always another woman, isn't there?" remarked the young deputy absently. "I mean there's always one to pitch in and

help with the kids, I reckon, unless a man lives at the North Pole, when his wife goes."

But he hadn't been paying much attention to the problem, his manner indicated. He had pulled out a silver pencil and a brownish paperbound notebook from his inner jacket pocket. He opened the notebook on his knee and unscrewed the pencil. John Bantreagh watched with dull, bloodshot eyes what he was writing.

"Mollie Bantreagh, Mrs. John Bantreagh, res. nr. Jeffville. Struck on back of head by tire iron or other instr'm't & run over by car's front wheels. Body found by husband—"

He looked up with sharp alertness at John Bantreagh, with his pencil halted. John Bantreagh swayed. He leaned back against his truck with his crank hanging from his hand. It was coming now—the question.

"What time did you find her, Mr. Bantreagh?"

John Bantreagh let his breath seep out. He stiffened his knees. It was bound to come. But this wasn't it yet.

"I haven't got a watch," he said tonelessly. "It was just getting kind of silver light. Maybe ten minutes ago. Maybe half an hour or three quarters—I don't know. It kind of knocked me out."

"I'll put it as four forty-five," said the young deputy sympathetically. "The exact time, I reckon, doesn't make any particular difference.

"'Found by husband at four forty-five,'" he recited as he wrote. "'Joined by Deputy Clade at five oh-three and scene observed. No footprints. No tire tread discernible on body; smudge on nylon stockings indication possible print had been wiped off by hand. Possible tiretracks on field obliterated by husband's car and Deputy Clade's. Implement with which struck removed by killer. No other objects apparent on scene to indicate identity.' I guess that's the story, Mr. Bantreagh."

He put away his book and pencil. He pushed his hat off the back of his head and set it on levelly again, with his frowning gaze a moment on her staring eyes.

John Bantreagh swallowed. "They're nylons?" he said.

"What? Her stockings? Oh, sure. All the women've got to have them. What did you think they were?"

"I thought they were rayons," said John Bantreagh. "The pair I got for her last Christmas. I thought they were just rayons all the time. But then tonight I figured they were nylons."

"Oh, sure," the young deputy repeated mechanically. "All the women've got to have them."

He pushed his hat on the back of his head again and stood up, taking his eyes from her.

"Who could have done it?" he repeated quietly, with his fists planted on his hips, looking down at John Bantreagh's pallid face and bloodshot eyes with his keen, alert gaze, with his fresh, keen brain behind it. "Who do you suppose could have done it, Mr. Bantreagh? I mean," he explained with frowning brow, "she couldn't have been murdered for her jewels and money, because I don't reckon she had any—more than just her wedding ring that she's still got on, and maybe a couple of nickels in her coin purse on her belt or something like that. It couldn't have been just a maniac, because how could he have got her out to a lonely place like this to murder her, without her putting up some sort of a fight and screaming?"

"It was some man she knew, who wanted to get rid of her. Because he was crazy about some beautiful little kid who was a few years younger than she was, maybe; and she knew about it, and was always nagging him, and stood in his way. And so he got her to ride out here with him, and he cracked her on the head with the tire iron or something that he had laid on the seat beside him handy, probably while he was making love to her, and then hauled her out and laid her down in front of his car, and ran his wheels up on her and crushed the life out of her. Figuring to drop her body in the ditch beside the road back near where she lived, like she had been struck by a hit-and-run while walking home.

"Only, after he had done it," the young deputy said, frowning at John Bantreagh, "he could see it wouldn't pass. The way her throat had been crushed would be only like she had been lying unconscious on the ground when she had been run over, just the way it had been done. There would be meadow mud and grassstains, maybe, on her dress. And maybe ten or a hundred other things that he couldn't think of at the moment but that wouldn't let it pass. So it was murder," he said quietly, "and nothing else. And there was nothing for him to do but just leave her here, and go on home and go to sleep, like nothing had happened, waiting till somebody else happened to find her. Figuring that it wouldn't be for some hours yet, at least. And maybe days, because it was such a lonely road. Though hoping, too, that it wouldn't be too long.

"And so, as I figure it, Mr. Bantreagh, he got up quietly from where he was kneeling beside her, when he was sure that she was dead, and backed away from her, to get into his car again, that he had rolled back off her, and back it down across the meadow to the road again. Figuring that, if he had left any tiretracks, a few hours more might dim them out. Or that maybe somebody else had tires like his, or that maybe when somebody else would come along, they would roll over them with their own tracks before they had noticed them."

The young deputy pushed his hat off the back of his head and set it on again.

"Now, there's just one thing that I've got to ask you, Mr. Bantreagh."

A faint dawn breath across the dewed meadow stirred a drape of his crisp, freshly pressed black jacket as he stood looking down at John Bantreagh. It stirred the ends of the black knit four-in-hand upon his expanse of white shirt above his flat, quiet-breathing diaphragm. The skin upon his hard, young, fresh-shaven face was shiny and tight, and a little muscle rippled at the corner of his mouth, though John Bantreagh's eyes did not lift that high.

His knees—John Bantreagh's—caved, and he stiffened them. He leaned back against the windshield post of his truck, thrusting his heels against the ground. His bloodshot eyes swam, out of focus. He fingered his throat with his left hand, glancing involuntarily down. There was a deep scratch or cut across the back of his right hand, he saw, that was gripped about the crank handle. He didn't remember when he had got it, but it was still oozing. Some of the blood must have seeped stickily around onto his clenched palm, helping to glue it to the iron.

Now! he thought. What form the question would take, he didn't know. But it must come. The throat muscles of the big young deputy were still moving beneath his broad, smooth-shaven chin. He had paused only for a moment.

"Just one question, Mr. Bantreagh," he repeated. "It may seem kind of cold and brutal of me to ask it, at a time like this," he added, a little awkwardly. "But if I didn't, someone else would, anyway. And they still will, I reckon, and keep on asking it until they've found out whatever there is to know. You understand, a law officer's got his job to do, and it's just impersonal. What I mean is, Mr. Bantreagh, was there anybody that she had been going around with that you ever heard about? A boyfriend that she had,



I mean—someone that she had been two-timing you with? Of course,” he added, “she might have been stepping out and you not have known anything about it. That happens, too. But there must have been someone, just on the face of it, because he would have been the only man in the world who would have had any cause to have done it, as sure as hell. Did she ever drop any hint to you about him, Mr. Bantreagh, as to who he was? I don’t mean to seem cold and brutal at a time like this.”

John Bantreagh swallowed. “I know you’ve got to ask your questions,” he said, pulling at the loose skin of his throat. “That’s all right. Yes, I reckon there was—” he swallowed “—someone. She used to go down to the village two or three times a week after supper; it’s only a couple of miles away. She’d tell me she was going to the free library to read magazines and books. She was always a great hand for reading. I couldn’t drive her in the truck because somebody had to stay home with the kids. I’d be asleep by the time she got home. But it seems she didn’t really go to the free library at all. This fellow would pick her up on the road, and they’d go riding in his car. I only learned about it last night.”

He swallowed again. He rubbed his forehead with his left hand. There was some small thing he was trying to remember. But there was much more that he wanted to forget.

“I woke up,” he said tonelessly, “with one of the kids crying. He was cold and wanted a blanket on him. Mollie always looked to their covers when she came home or got up in the night herself. But she hadn’t got home yet. By the looks of the moonlight out on the yard, it looked kind of late. I held the alarm clock to the window, and it was one o’clock. I lit the lamp and put on my pants and shoes and went out to the road in front and looked down it, but didn’t see her coming. There was something white on the front porch of the Turner house a quarter mile down, but that was all.

“So I went back in and covered the kids up better, tucking them in. They sure looked cute in their new pajamas, and I wished she was there to see them. I’d got pajamas for them with my tire order that had come in the morning, pink and white stripes for the boys, and the baby’s blue with white ducks on them. She hadn’t seen them in them yet; she’d gone out right after supper, before I’d gotten them to bed. That made me think—” John Bantreagh swallowed “—of the nylons. Her birthday was tomorrow—today. Twenty-nine. And I had ordered her a pair of nylons. I figured she would like them. She had never had any.

"I had left them out in the truck in back, under the seat, to get and give her in the morning. But I thought it might be kind of nice to put them in her bottom drawer for her, where she kept her things, and kind of say something to her in the morning, joking like, that I had heard a mouse in her drawer last night, maybe it was making a nest. And she would hurry to open it and pull out all her things, and would find them at the bottom, and it would surprise her.

"So I brought them in in their envelope," said John Bantreagh tonelessly, "and opened her drawer and took out some of her things on top, the balls of socks that she generally wears, and her blouses and skirts she had made, and a couple of starched housedresses. She kept her rayons in the drawer, I knew. But she was wearing them, I thought. I didn't know she had any other stockings." He swallowed. "But there were lots of stockings there, hid away at the bottom. A dozen pairs of them. They were the same color as her rayons, but they were smooth and slick. They had the feel of the nylons I had bought her now. And there were underthings—pink things, silk and nylon things, things with lace on them. There was even a set of black lace, step-ins and bras. They were what she had been wringing out, or others like them, when I'd been putting on my new tires that forenoon, in a little squeezed-up handful before my eyes. I don't know what there is about black lace things. They're not what a woman gets for herself. They make it seem more awful, somehow.

"I was kind of upwrought," John Bantreagh swallowed. "There was a pint out in the kitchen cupboard that her sister's husband had given me last summer when they visited, only I'm not much of a drinking man. But I got it down and took some now. I thought I'd better go and find her. I put on a shirt and coat, and put the matches up on the kitchen shelf where the kids couldn't reach them, and put out the lamp. I went out to crank the truck. I had just picked up the crank when I looked around and thought I saw her on the back porch behind me, among the moonlight and the vines. Only it wasn't her. It wasn't anything. It was just the moonlight moving."

John Bantreagh pulled at his throat. "I cranked the truck then," he went on, swallowing, "and got in it, and went down the road towards the village. On the Turner porch steps, just off the road, there was something white. It was Lilybelle, sitting in the moonlight in her nightdress with her arms about her knees. 'Hello, Mr.

Bantreagh!' she called out to me, kind of low. 'Where are you going at this time of night? What's happened to Mrs. Bantreagh?'

"I stopped." John Bantreagh swallowed. "I didn't want any gossip started. 'What do you mean, what's happened to her?' I said..

"I woke up and came out on the steps a little while ago,' she said. 'The moonlight was so pretty. And I looked up the road, and thought I saw somebody going into your house, like she had just got home.'

"No,' I told her. 'It must have been me. Mollie's been home since ten o'clock.' Not wanting to start any gossip.

"I love the moonlight,' Lilybelle said. 'It's so quiet and so mysterious. I saw a lamp lit in your house, and then put out again. I heard your back screen door slam, and thought I heard you say something like, "What have you been doing, Mollie?" kind of sharp and mad. Then I could hear you cranking your car. I wondered if maybe she wasn't feeling well, and you were going for the doctor.'

"No,' I told her. 'I guess for a minute I thought maybe she had come out on the back porch behind me. But it wasn't her. It was just the vines moving in the moonlight. I just thought I'd take a ride to set my new tires right.'

"Then—" John Bantreagh swallowed "—I don't know why, but she looked so kind of pretty, with her dark curls and her big eyes, and the moonlight silver on her nightdress and her bare feet, and I had the nylons on the seat beside me, that I'd brought back out to the truck again, without knowing it; and I said to her, 'Would you like a pair of nylons, Lilybelle?' And she got up and came out to the truck, and stood up on the running board beside me and opened them.

"My!' she said. 'You sure know your way around, Mr. Bantreagh! What is it a bribe for? Have you murdered Mrs. Bantreagh, and you want me to keep it quiet?'"

John Bantreagh swallowed.

"Laughing," he said. "Just joking. She didn't have an idea that she was dead, of course. And she looked in the back of my truck, where I've got those old burlaps, and she said to me, 'Why, you did! You have! And you've got her body in there now, Mr. Bantreagh!'

"That's right,' I told her. 'No sense in trying to fool you. I hit her over the head with my truck crank because she'd been nagging me about you, Lilybelle. Now the deck's all clear for you and me. What'll it be—Niagara Falls?'

"Wanting to just take it along in stride with her." John Bantreagh swallowed. "Just joking like a fellow does with a girl when she's pretty."

The young deputy, competent and cool, looked at him with alert and steady eyes, as gray as the dawn.

"For Pete's sake," he said, "is that all, Mr. Bantreagh? I thought you might know something about this fellow she had been stepping out with. But you don't even know for sure that there was anybody. She might have bought her stockings and lingerie stuff herself, with some grocery money that she had held out on you. Here she is dead. Somebody killed her. But all you can tell about is how you covered up your kids, and the new pajamas they were wearing, and thinking for a minute you saw her on the back porch when you were starting to crank your truck, only it was just the vine leaves and moonlight, and then some kidding conversation you had with this Lilybelle babe back and forth, to keep her from starting any gossip. But how is that telling anything about who killed her?" He shook his head with an exhalation of his flat diaphragm. "If it wasn't that it's murder, I could almost laugh," he said. "Maybe she didn't have any boyfriend. Maybe nobody killed her."

"Oh yes, she did," said John Bantreagh tonelessly. "Oh yes, he killed her. I drove on into the village after leaving Lilybelle. Everything was all dark and shut up, except the Waldorf All-nite lunch wagon on the square across from the free library. I went in there, and the counterman was behind the counter, and a truck driver or somebody eating a piece of pie. I asked what time the free library had closed tonight. And the counterman said it had closed at five o'clock; it wasn't ever open at night.

"I said to him," he said tiredly, "had he seen a lady in a white dress with big polka dots on it, and white shoes with red heels, with light brown wavy hair and hazel eyes, and plucked eyebrows and a red mouth, about twenty-nine? And he said there was a lady like that who sometimes came in between eleven and midnight and got sandwiches or things like that, and took them out to her boyfriend in their car, but she hadn't been in tonight. It was almost two o'clock now, he said, and so she probably wouldn't be in now.

"Then—" John Bantreagh swallowed "—the truck driver spoke up and asked me if she lived up on Jaybird Road, and if she hung around the Swamp Run culvert bridge in the evenings, about half a mile out of town. I said yes, I reckoned she lived somewhere up that way. He said that he had seen her half a dozen times when

he was going along Jaybird Road, sitting on the abutment of the culvert in the evenings, like she was waiting for someone. And he had given her his horn and a high sign, only he was generally in a hurry, and there were babes like her along every road, and he could have all of them he wanted. But one time last month, he said, he had come coasting toward the culvert bridge with his engine off—there's a grade down before it, and he was a little low on gas—and he saw her sitting there, not knowing anyone was near. She was stretching out her nylon legs and tightening up her garters to some black lace things she had on. And she had looked up just as his truck rolled to her, and had smiled at him.

"It had driven him kind of wild," said John Bantreagh tiredly. "He had stopped his truck and jumped out to grab her. Just then he had looked around, and there was a car that was stopping at the side of the road, just off the culvert bridge, about twenty feet away in the shadows under the trees. There was some man in it, looking at him. He had let go of her and had jumped back into his truck again and driven off.

"What are you looking for her for?" he said to me. "Are you trying to make her yourself? Brother, if I was you, I wouldn't! I'm big and plenty tough myself, and I'm not scared of anything. But there was something about that guy. . . . Your wife?" he said—I guess I must have said something—"If she was my wife, with those black lace things and that smile she had, I'd kill her!"

"So I knew." John Bantreagh swallowed. "But I had known when I found those nylons and things. I reckon I had kind of known all along, if I had thought about it. I drove around looking for her," he said tonelessly. "Along every road I came to. It was just breaking dawn when I came along the back road here. I saw something white off in the meadow, and I drove in through the break in the fence and found her. It kind of knocked me out."

The breath of dawn air across the silvered grass stirred the ends of the young deputy's black knit tie upon his expanse of snow-white shirt. He stood motionless with fists on hips. There was nothing else stirring about his hard, towering figure or about the world. Only John Bantreagh's knees, which caved and caved.

No, his knees weren't caving any more. It was just a lingering of ceased sensations, that they still were.

"Who was he?" the calm, alert voice of Deputy Roy Clade came to him. "I guess this counterman and this truck driver wouldn't know. But what did he look like? Did they say?"

"They didn't get a look at him," said John Bantreagh tiredly. "When she had come into the Waldorf, he had always stayed in his car across the street, with his lights out in the blackness under the trees around the square. The truck-driving fellow didn't see what he looked like either. He just got scared and jumped in his truck and drove away."

"Cagey," commented Roy Clade. "He was taking care that nobody saw him with her, if he ever had to get rid of her like he did. Maybe he knew from his experience that these married ones are hard to ditch. What kind of a car did he have, did they say?"

"They didn't know the make," said John Bantreagh tiredly. "It was just a black sedan."

"Nine cars out of ten—" said Roy Clade, "nine out of ten are black sedans. I've got one myself. There's nothing in that, unless they got his license number. And they wouldn't have, if he was that cagey. He would have had his plates muddled over."

"No, they didn't get his license number," said John Bantreagh tiredly. "Nobody ever did, I reckon, that saw her with him. He was cagey, like you say."

The big young deputy shook his head. He sighed, with a quiet heaving of his diaphragm beneath his shirt.

"It's not any good, I'm afraid, Mr. Bantreagh," he said. "Nobody knows who he is, where he lives, what he looks like, the number of his car license or anything. Just this counterman and this truck driver who knew that she had been stepping out with some man that had a car, and maybe two or three more people here or around who may have seen her getting into it with him from a distance when it was getting dark, or getting out of it below the place next to yours when he brought her home. He was awful cagey. He did it, all right, I reckon. But he'll get away with it, as sometimes happens. I'm awfully sorry, Mr. Bantreagh, but I'm afraid the police have been left with nothing to go on at all."

John Bantreagh rubbed his forehead. So much—so much to forget. That he would try to forget. That he must keep from the kids forever. So much to forget, even of bright and tender things, of when he had been younger and she had been so very young, no older than Lilybelle, and all the world had been pink-colored and full of joy. He had known that he could never give her all she wanted. It hadn't been her fault that it had come to this. It had been his. If he had only been a little smarter. Though it could not be mended now. So much to forget, of shame and grief and failure.

But some small, trivial thing to remember. And now he had remembered it.

"Nothing to go on, except what she told me," he said.

"What she told you?" said Deputy Roy Clade thinly. "I thought you said that she had never told you anything. That you never knew a thing about it or had the least suspicion until last night."

He stood motionless. His eyes were gray as the dawn. John Bantreagh lifted his blurred bloodshot gaze and met Roy Clade's gray eyes.

"What she told me after I had found her," said John Bantreagh. "Just before she died."

"You mean—" said Roy Clade, with the muscles moving on his face. "You mean," he said, with his eyes as gray as dawn, "that she was still alive? You mean that she told you? Why, you're crazy, you damn apple-knocking liar! She's been dead since one o'clock!"

His right fist jerked from his hip. He jerked it upward against his shoulder, with a contorted look upon his face and his mouth opening in a scream.

John Bantreagh had got his pendent right arm in motion. He had swung it, stepping in on knees swift and wiry, no longer caving, cracking the truck crank across the bones of Roy Clade's thick, strong wrist as the young deputy's fist left his hip. With his wrist against his shoulder, Roy Clade screamed.

John Bantreagh snapped his left hand forward, grabbed the gun out of its holster, dropped his crank, sidestepping. He had the gun in his right hand now, and the hammer back.

"Both hands out from your shoulders!" he said. "No use to yell at me and damn me! Heel! You know what this is. You know how it shoots. Heel, and swing your arms slowly back behind you till I have got your handcuffs on!"

"Maybe she didn't tell me," he said, with a dry gasp in his throat. "But you did! Here I was beside her body, with blood on my hand, with the crank that might have been the thing that knocked her out, with my truck tracks leading right up to her, and no other tracks but them upon the field! Here I was; her husband, the first man in the world to be suspected, even if there was nothing to show that I had ever been around here at all! Here I was, that had drunk whisky tonight, that had given a pair of nylons to Lilybelle after she was dead! That had told Lilybelle I had killed her and had her body in my truck! That had gone in and talked to the counterman and the truck driver kind of wild, and maybe said that



I would kill her when I found her—I don't know. A man gets to talking wild when he thinks of his wife and those black lace things, and his man's pride.

"Here I was, with everything saying it was me! Why, my best friends would have thought sure I'd done it! They would have figured some reason why—Lilybelle, or some argument we'd had about the kids, or about some fellow that she'd been stepping out with—wouldn't make any difference who. They would all have said that I had done it. At the least you might have asked me if I had. But you knew I hadn't done it. Only the man who had killed her himself, in all this world, would know that! No need to swear at me. Hold your hands behind you! You know what this is against your back.

"It took me a long time to figure out," said John Bantreagh tiredly. "I was knocked out. Just like a dummy. But I told you what her name was, and you pretended never to have heard it before. I didn't tell you how to spell it, though—I didn't think that you might write it down. Everybody who just hears it thinks it's spelled *t-r-y*, like 'pantry.' I always have a lot of trouble getting it spelled right. Thought sometimes of changing it myself. But you spelled it right without being told when you wrote it down in your notebook. I've been trying to think how you knew, ever since you did.

"And other things you didn't think of, I reckon! You've got that tire iron in your car's tool kit or in your garage at home—you must still have it, you've mentioned it so often. And even if you've washed it with soap and water or kerosene, there will still be blood in the pores of the iron that will show in some of these machines that they have these days, I reckon you know. There will be blood on your car cushions. Maybe on the shirt and suit you wore last night.

"And you went home and slept," John Bantreagh said, "while I was out looking on every road for her all night! And got up, and took a bath, and shaved and rubbed yourself with sweet-smelling shaving lotion, and put on a clean white shirt and your crisp black suit and your black knit tie, and came on back here to park just inside the woods' edge off the road, to wait for her to be discovered. Only I was already here when you came.

"There'll be the blood! There's her name, that you knew how to spell. And somewhere—yes, somewhere, when they get to looking, no matter how careful and cagey you have tried to be—there will be someone that has seen you and her together, when they go

looking into it, and can tie you up in an iron way.

"Get into the back of your car! No need to blaspheme me. Kneel on the floor! I'm going to have to put some of my truck lashings around you. You're powerful, and your brain is fresh and new-slept and smart. But I don't think you're going to get away. I'll try to get you to the doctor as quick as I can. I'm sorry that I had to hit so hard. I'm sorry that there'll be bumps..

"Kneel on the floor, and pray!" John Bantreagh said. "I wouldn't have ever known who you were. Nobody would have ever known about you, with nothing to start them looking into you. They would have put it on me, her husband, caught with her, caught red-handed, caught with motive, and I'd have got twenty years or life. And what would have happened to the kids is more than I can bear to think. The fear of it made my knees cave. It made me so blind that I could hardly see. If you had asked me whether I had done it, I would have fallen dead away. But it won't be that way. You told me."

He looked—John Bantreagh—at that still form lying in front of his truck wheels, with her staring eyes. "Perhaps," he said, "she helped."

---

## SOLUTION TO THE JUNE "UNSOLVED":

---

Earl Mahler from South Carolina was the intended victim of his bride "Flora," she in the red bikini. Her murdering accomplice was Bert North from Wyoming.

HUSBAND	WIFE	BIKINI	STATE
Abe Purdy	Dolly	white	Utah
Bert North	Alice	blue	Wyoming
Chet O'Hara	Elena	green	Tennessee
Don Rogers	Betty	orange	Texas
Earl Mahler	Flora	red	S. Carolina
Fred Queen	Clara	yellow	Virginia

# BOOKED & PRINTED

by Mary Cannon



**D**avid Handler's hero, Stewart Hoag, makes his living ghosting celebrity memoirs. Gone are the days when he was lionized by literary critics and married to the beautiful Merilee, but Hoagy faces his situation with a wicked sense of humor, a wardrobe worthy of Beau Brummel, and an irresistible, loyal beagle named Lulu. Hoagy may have hit an all-time low in **The Man Who Cancelled Himself** (Doubleday, \$19.95), though. His new collaborator is an outrageous comic named Lyle Hudnut, known to TV sitcom audiences as "Uncle Chubby." Hoagy is not only supposed to help Lyle tell his side of the story in a revealing "autobiography"; he's also been hired to catch a prankster before the tricks plaguing the hit TV show escalate to murder. Imagine William Powell on the wagon, Myrna Loy huge with child, and Asta as a beagle who eats catfood. This is more fun than a good glass of bubbly.

Nevada Barr continues her award-winning series starring park ranger Anna Pigeon in **Ill Wind** (Putnam, \$19.95). Anna's new assignment is the desert of Colorado's Mesa Verde National Park. She's happy to be back in her beloved desert, but she's lonesome for the company of her former roommate and the woman's young daughter, and all too often she drowns her grief for her late husband in a bottle. Hordes of summer tourists come to the park to visit the ruins of the mysterious and puzzling Anasazi, a whole people gone without a trace. Archaeologists have only theories concerning the evil that wiped them from the face of the earth. More pressing to Anna: the evil that resulted in the mysterious death of a fellow ranger among the ruins. Barr depicts Anna as bold and fearless, a woman capable of surviving physical threats, which

lends *Ill Wind* the excitement of an adventure novel. At the same time Anna's emotional turmoil is poignantly presented, her relationships with others (especially her long-distance calls to her sister, the shrink) are fascinating, and her strong love of the outdoors reads like powerful poetry.

Charles Kenney's first novel, **Hammurabi's Code** (Simon & Schuster, \$22), is an auspicious debut authored by a real reporter on the *Boston Globe*. The thriller opens with a bang. One of Boston's most revered public figures, populist Councillor Phillip Stewart, is murdered in his own home. The *Boston Post* calls ace reporter Frank Cronin back from vacation to investigate the killing. The police have no leads, and his competitors are all giving space to laud Stewart's memory. Cronin instead begins to pen articles that tarnish the great man's reputation. Joining forces with an old cop near retirement and a woman D.A. whom he begins to love, Cronin finally has little choice. He must risk everything—his career, his happiness, even his life—if he is to prove that Stewart actually died for his sins. The ending should take your breath away.

**By Evil Means** (Bantam, \$4.99) is Sandra West Prowell's sequel to her award-winning debut of Montana private eye Phoebe Siegel. It won't disappoint fans. Phoebe is just days away from her annual Ides of March leave of absence. As always, she plans to ponder the dire March events in her history and especially mourn the suicide of her cop brother Ben several years before. But client Mary Kuntz won't take no for an answer. She is worried about her teenage daughter Jennifer, and insists that only Phoebe can take the case. Phoebe soon learns the surprising reason why Mary has chosen her, and with dread she agrees with her client. Her investigation will unearth family secrets, expose unforgivable betrayals, and put Phoebe at risk of losing her best friend, her faith in her own personal history, and perhaps her life. Phoebe Siegel is quickly moving up in the ranks of top-notch private eyes every reader will want represented on his or her bookshelf.

Police Superintendent Thomas Pitt and his well-bred wife Charlotte return in **Traitors Gate** (Fawcett Columbine, \$21.50), the latest Victorian mystery by the masterful Anne Perry. As Charlotte revels in the homely joys of their new house, her husband's recent promotion puts him in line to investigate a leak in the Colonial Office that could prove devastating to England's African plans. Thomas is also grieving for Sir Arthur Desmond, an apparent suicide; he has promised his mentor's son that he will try to clear the dead man's name. When the corpse of a high-placed official's

wife is discovered washed ashore at Traitors Gate on the Thames, Thomas is certain that he's up against the powerful Inner Circle, a secret society that acts above the law. As always, Perry has entwined several stories into a complex plot that deftly draws in characters who have appeared in earlier books as well as introducing numerous memorable new faces. And as always, the result is solid entertainment.

Dana Stabenow's Alaskan settings for her earlier Kate Shugak novels make them irresistible, and **Play with Fire** (Berkley, \$19.95) is happily more of the same. Kate is moonlighting in the Alaskan interior in the company of two friends, camping and dining on moose pot roast. They have been sweating in the summer sun to pick the rare mushrooms that have sprouted in the aftermath of a huge forest fire. They then drive into a nearby village and sell them to a guy who ships them to fancy restaurants. It's hot but lucrative, until Kate stumbles on more than mushrooms. She finds a corpse, and he didn't die in a fire. The next day a boy from the village asks Kate if she's really a private eye, and then proceeds to hire her to locate his father. It doesn't take long for the body to be identified as Daniel Seabolt, local teacher, son of the community's charismatic preacher, and father of Kate's young client. Now Kate wants to know what killed Seabolt, even though no one, not even his son, wants her to dig any deeper. The method of murder is clever, and the conclusion is a shocker, capping a thoroughly entertaining tale.

Fans of British mysteries will appreciate Deborah Crombie's latest, **Leave the Grass Green** (Scribner, \$20), which brings back the winning homicide team of Detective Duncan Kincaid and Sergeant Gemma Jones. A body discovered in a Thames river lock is identified as the son-in-law of a titled operatic conductor and his wife, a former soprano and now a celebrated singing coach. They have the pull to get Scotland Yard assigned to the case, so Kincaid and Jones head for the Chiltern Hills outside of London. The case has an eerie déjà vu quality in that twenty years earlier the Asherton's son Matthew, a musical prodigy, tragically drowned at the age of ten. His sister Julia was with him that fateful day, and it is her estranged husband who has just died. Crombie serves up a satisfying read with engaging detectives, a peek behind the scenes at an opera company, and a moody and compelling plot of old secrets that can twist love into death.

Inspector Morse is back on the Oxford homicide beat in Colin Dexter's latest, **The Daughters of Cain** (Crown, \$21). Ten previ-

ous novels and the popular PBS television show have led fans to expect Morse's intelligent, sophisticated, and unconventional approach to murder, and this latest novel won't disappoint them. A retired don from one of Oxford's colleges is stabbed to death, and the trail leads to a servant at the victim's college. All well and good until the prime suspect disappears, and Morse thinks he's also fallen victim to foul play. Suddenly there are suspects galore, including one fascinating young woman with strong ties to both men—and a third connection quickly forming to Morse himself. Morse makes a fine guide on this tour of the human heart, driven by love, haunted by betrayal, headed for death.

"This is the darkest story that I ever heard," says Ben Wade, small town doctor in Choctaw, Alabama, and narrator of Thomas H. Cook's new novel, **Breakheart Hill** (Bantam, \$22.95). Jumping back and forth from Ben's high school days to the present, we witness his growing friendship with a lovely and gifted new girl in school. We quickly learn where this sad story is leading: to a hot August afternoon in 1962 when Kelli Troy will meet her murderer on the hill. Cook breathes such life into the young people and their insular world that one's heart aches for days gone by and dreams turned to dust. We can see that Ben, among others, has paid a high price for more than thirty years to protect a dark secret. For the reader, the agonizing suspense lies in a single question: what part did Ben play in the tragedy? In haunting, lyrical style Cook relates a mesmerizing tale of love and betrayal.

Dianne Day introduces a delightful turn-of-the-century heroine in **The Strange Files of Fremont Jones** (Doubleday, \$19.95). Born Caroline Fremont Jones and recently graduated from Wellesley, Fremont leaves behind her father and new stepmother (as well as her first name) to make a new life in San Francisco. She settles in at a respectable boardinghouse, hangs out a shingle as a "type-writer," and prepares herself for adventure. She finds it in spades. Day imbues Fremont's debut with gothic overtones, a dash of romance, and a couple of rousing and good-natured action scenes. Given Fremont's curiosity and fearlessness, I'm contentedly confident that we'll be privy to ensuing tales from her "strange files."

# MURDER BY DIRECTION

by William Heller



**T**he Red Menace was the perfect villain for more than a few spy thrillers, but now that Communism has receded into history, writers and filmmakers are in search of a replacement. In **Outbreak** a deadly disease is the enemy. In real life there's AIDS, and in reel life there's the Motaba virus, whose fatality rate is one hundred percent and whose incubation period is a frighteningly short two days.

In the story the killer virus makes its way to these shores from Africa, brought here by an infected monkey who was picked up by a sailor on board a ship heading for America's west coast. Once here, the virus spreads like wildfire—from the monkey to a man peddling it to a pet shop, to his girlfriend across the country, to the pet shop owner, a medical technician who treats him, and on and on.

The initial symptoms of the virus suggest the flu, but this killer makes bubonic plague look like the common cold. Since Superman isn't around to help out here, we get Dustin Hoffman in the form of Dr. Sam Daniels, a military M.D. headquartered at the U.S. Army's Medical Research Institute for Infectious Diseases.

Despite its morbid subject, *Outbreak* is a real thriller, complete with a high-level government conspiracy so wicked you wonder why Oliver Stone didn't make this movie. As a veteran army medical man, Hoffman leads a group of doctors—a sort of military SWAT team—into action to battle the baffling bug.

Heading his team is Rene Russo as his hardworking and ambitious former wife. She's just started a new job at the Centers for Disease Control, right after her split from Hoff-



man is final. When they work together, sparks fly.

At first, their relationship is a bit out of place against the background of the serious matter at hand. An argument over who gets custody of their two big dogs seems trivial in comparison to the deadly virus, which soon takes center stage. And when you hear a line like "I cannot believe you are taking a deadly virus and turning it into a personal matter," you can only imagine it's satire. But when Russo later contracts the disease, it gives Hoffman a personal reason to go on despite insurmountable odds.

Kevin Spacey offers comic relief as a wisecracking fellow doctor. And Cuba Gooding, Jr., nearly steals the show as a young virologist and helicopter pilot extraordinaire who single-handedly turns Hoffman into a big-screen action hero by making him leap from a moving chopper.

Morgan Freeman plays a general who is Hoffman's longtime friend and his commanding officer. He's forced to choose sides in the morality play that is the government conspiracy. That evil conspiracy is led by a sinister Donald Sutherland.

When the initial outbreak of Motaba hits, Hoffman works feverishly to solve the deadly puzzle, but when it contaminates the rural California town

of Cedar Creek, leaving many of its inhabitants gravely ill, he is mysteriously ordered off the case. Despite the order, Hoffman bravely continues his work, dodging the virus and his superior officers as well.

When the army quarantines the entire town, ringing it with armed troops and barbed wire, the results are chilling and bring to mind the classic *Invasion of the Body Snatchers*, in which another small California town is overcome—that one by alien pods—and the army is forced into action.

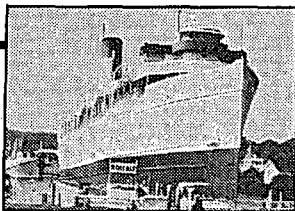
The rapid spread of the virus through the afflicted town of Cedar Creek starts at a local movie theater; one infected person begins coughing and spreading his germs, which are shown on-screen in dizzying, paranoia-inducing, 1950's science fiction style. The scene is unforgettable.

*Outbreak* also recalls the movie *Fail-Safe*. Once the pilots in that film are ordered to bomb Russia, they cannot be called back. In this newer drama, once the bombers are called in to stop the dreaded virus with conventional firepower, a similar tension builds as they close in on their target.

All in all, *Outbreak* is intriguing, suspenseful, and entertaining, but the movie theater scene might keep people from seeing it twice.

# THE STORY THAT WON

The February Mystery was won by Vicki Leigh. Honorable mentions go California; Richard M. Ohio; Bernice F. Weiss sey; Terrill L. Burlison Art Cosing of Fairfax, Virginia; Lesa Neace of Whitesburg, Kentucky; Patricia Jackson of Scottsdale, Arizona; Bob Wynn of Young's Point, Ontario, Canada; and Victor P. Dufault of Noank, Connecticut.



ous Photograph contest of Lexington, Kentucky. to Gerri Riker of Tujunga, Millard of Whitehall, of Livingston, New Jersey of Kent, Washington; Art Cosing of Fairfax, Virginia; Lesa Neace of Whitesburg, Kentucky; Patricia Jackson of Scottsdale, Arizona; Bob Wynn of Young's Point, Ontario, Canada; and Victor P. Dufault of Noank, Connecticut.

Roy Rigger

## THE TENDERLOINED, PURE-BROILED BOAT by Vicki Leigh

"You did *what* with it?" Papa Leoni gaped at his youngest son.

"But, Papa, I done everything right," replied Joey with pleading but unimaginably stupid eyes.

If the Leoni family was not one of the major crime families of the East, it was not for lack of trying. For decades Papa had been building a reputation, padding his gang and rising steadily on the crime scene. But that had all changed. Leoni was no longer a respected name, it was a laughing-stock. Why? Joey.

"I told you," Papa said with deliberate calm, "to rob the ship. Not steal it. And, no, you moron, they are *not* the same thing. And to put it . . . there!" Papa Leoni shook with rage. "What possessed you to put it with your Uncle Vinnie's boat rentals?"

Joey smiled with pride. "Hey, Papa, ain't you never heard of 'The Tenderloined Letter'? Or was it 'The Pure-broiled Letter'? Anyway, it was a story about hiding a letter in with a bunch of other letters, right? And I done the same thing. I put this boat with Uncle Vinnie's boats."

"But it's in the middle of the river!" Papa roared.

"Yeah," agreed Joey, smiling broadly. "They'll never find it there."

"Joey," said Papa, shaking his head in disgust, "I got this feeling that boat ain't the only thing that's going up the river."

---

# CLASSIFIED MARKETPLACE

---

AM JULY '95

---

HITCHCOCK/QUEEN combination CLASSIFIED AD rate is \$4.80 per word—payable in advance (\$72.00 minimum). Capitalized words 60¢ per word additional. To be included in the next issue please send order and remittance to Judy Dorman, DELL MAGAZINES, 1540 Broadway, New York, N.Y. 10036.

---

## ADDITIONAL INCOME

\$1000 weekly processing mail free details, send SASE: P.O. Box 2822, Fullerton, CA 92633-2822.

GET PAID FOR READING BOOKS! Up to \$100 per book. Send name, address to Calco Publishing, (Dept. C627), 500 South Broad, Meriden, CT 06450.

---

## BOOKS & PERIODICALS

100,000 science fiction and mystery paperback, magazines, hardcovers. Free catalogs! Pandora's, Box Z-54, Neche, ND 58265-0133.

MYSTERY ADDICTS! Free catalogue! New and Recycled Detective Fiction. Grave Matters, Box 32192-C, Cincinnati, OH 45232, 513-242-7527.

FREE catalogs. Collectible and used mystery fiction. Murder Is Served, 5273 Bittersweet Drive, Dayton, OH 45429, 513-438-0211.

FREE catalog of used and collectible detective fiction. Dunn and Powell Books, Dept. DP, The Hideaway, Bar Harbor, Maine 04609.

FREE CATALOGS. Mystery, Hardcover, Vintage paperbacks, Ed McDonald's Mostly Mystery, PO Box 971, Stratford, CT 06497.

MYSTERY HOUSE BOOKS - FREE mystery book catalog. Want lists accepted. 7066 Byram Street, Reading PA 19606.

SUMMERTIME NEWS! Television reporter Jenny McKay ("A more streetwise version of Murphy Brown") is back in SUMMERTIME NEWS—a new mystery by Dick Belsky. A Berkley Prime Crime paperback available at bookstores.

---

## BOOKS & PERIODICALS—Cont'd

PUBLISH YOUR BOOK NOW! Your book can be produced and promoted by the leading subsidy book publisher. Send for free brochure HP-5, Vantage Press, 516 W. 34th Street, New York, NY 10001.

---

## EDUCATION & INSTRUCTION

WITCHCRAFT Occult Miracle Power Secrets. Gavin and Yvonne Frost. Now accepting students. 1502-AN, New Bern, NC 28563.

---

## MYSTERY

\$5000 REWARD could be yours if you can solve this murder mystery. You'll receive the complete police file including photos. Send \$19.95 to: B.S.G., 3695 Sonoma Avenue, Suite 6, Santa Rosa, CA 95405.

---

## MYSTERY CRUISE

8TH, annual MYSTERY CRUISE, March 17, 1996. Seven day Caribbean cruise to Aruba, Curacao, Tortola, St. Thomas, aboard NCL's M.V. Seaward. Call CruiseWorks, 800-876-6664.

---

## PERSONAL

Nationwide introductions! Refined singles 18-80. Also, Japanese, Asian, European! Identify. Box 315-DT, Royal Oak, Michigan 48068.

BEAUTIFUL BRITISH LADIES & ELIGIBLE BRITISH GENTLEMEN seek friendship, romance & marriage with Americans! All ages! Free details: ENGLISH ROSE INTRODUCTION AGENCY (Dept. AHEQ), 24, Cecil Square, Margate, Kent CT9 1BA, ENGLAND. TEL/FAX: 01144-1843-290735 (24 Hours).



# Alfred Hitchcock's Anthology Warehouse Sale!

Join us in our anthology warehouse sale with great savings! For only \$12.95 (includes postage and handling), you will receive five classic Alfred Hitchcock anthologies. Our warehouse is packed with anthologies that will provide you with hours of great reading. Act quickly...

Please send your name and address  
with your check or money order for \$12.95 to:

**Alfred Hitchcock  
P.O. Box 40  
Vernon, NJ 07462**

Please allow 6-8 weeks for delivery. Outside U.S.  
Canadian orders add \$4.00, foreign orders add \$6.00.

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG  
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

MUAA5

PUT SOME MYSTERY  
INTO YOUR EVERYDAY LIFE!



APPLYING IS EASY!

JUST CALL (800) 777-9901  
AND ASK FOR "MYSTERY."

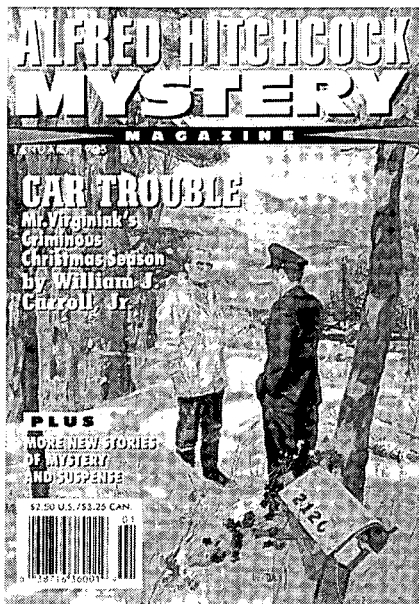
NO ANNUAL FEE\*

LOW 12.9% APR\*

\*For the first year. After the first year, the variable rate as of December 1, 1994, would be 16.65% for a High Line Card, 17.65% for a Standard Card and 21.55% for a Secured Card. The APR for cash advances would be 21.55%. The annual fee would be \$40 for a High Line Card, \$20 for a Standard Card and \$35 for a Secured Card. The transaction fee for a cash advance is 2% of the advance with a minimum of \$2 and a maximum of \$10.

ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

SOME  
PEOPLE  
WOULD  
KILL...



**SUBSCRIBE  
NOW AND  
SAVE OVER 28%  
OFF THE  
NEWSSTAND  
PRICE**

FOR A COPY.

**TOLL FREE**

**1-800-333-3311**

**BY MAIL**

**Alfred Hitchcock • P.O. Box 5124  
Harlan, IA 51593**

In U.S. receive 18 issues for only \$29.97 or 12 issues for \$20.97.  
Outside U.S. & Poss., 18 issues for \$39.97, 12 issues for \$27.97. All foreign orders  
must be paid in U.S. currency. Canadian orders include GST.

Please allow four to six weeks for delivery of your first issue. We publish two double  
issues, in June and Mid-December. These count as two each towards your subscription.

**LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG  
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED**

HUNC3

# GET ALL 3 BOOKS FREE!

Introducing...

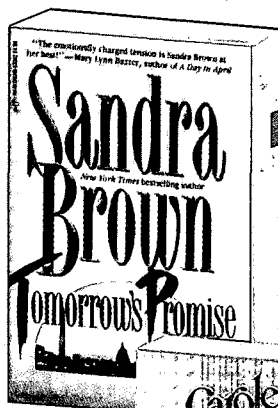
## The Best of the Best™

**Superb collector's editions of the very best romance novels by the world's best known authors!**

If you like romance you'll love "The Best of the Best," the series that brings you the best books by the world's hottest romance authors!

We're making you this special offer to introduce you to "The Best of the Best." Your three books have a combined cover price of \$13.50, but they're yours free! (All you pay is a 99¢ delivery charge. Send no money now—we'll bill you later.) After receiving your free books, if you don't wish to receive any more, write "cancel" on the statement and return it with your 99¢ payment. You'll be under no further obligation.

If you do not cancel, about a month later we'll send you 3 more books and bill you just \$3.74 each plus 25¢ delivery.\* You may return a shipment at our expense and cancel at any time, even after your first shipment. "The Best of the Best" never makes you buy a minimum number of books or remain a member any longer than you like. So go ahead—accept our special offer. You'll be glad you did!



**FREE!**

**TOMORROW'S PROMISE**  
by Sandra Brown  
A sensuously written romance by this extraordinarily popular bestselling author!



**FREE!**

**GYPSY**  
by Carole Mortimer  
Author of over 70 top-selling romances, "Mortimer has a special magic."  
—Romantic Times

**AFTERSHOCKS**  
by Catherine Coulter  
Over 15 million books in print

## GET ALL 3 BOOKS FREE!



**YES**, send me the three novels under the terms described above, and bill me just 99¢ for delivery. I am under no obligation to purchase anything further and I may cancel at any time. Also send my free porcelain trinket box!

183-SPA-ASP3

Name \_\_\_\_\_

Address \_\_\_\_\_

City \_\_\_\_\_

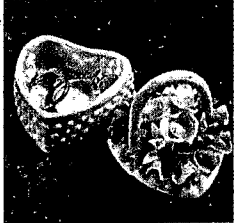
State \_\_\_\_\_

Zip \_\_\_\_\_

MAIL TO: THE BEST OF THE BEST  
P.O. BOX 9017 • BUFFALO, NY 14269-0017

## SPECIAL FREE GIFT!

Get this beautiful hand-painted porcelain trinket box—**FREE**—just for giving "The Best of the Best" a try!



\*Jewelry not included

\*Terms and prices subject to change without notice. Sales tax applicable in N.Y. Offer not valid to current "Best of the Best" subscribers. Offer limited to one per household.

ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED